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A SHORT

VIEW

OF THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,

AS CONTAINED IN

TWO SERMONS,

BY THE REV. *JER. SEED,*

TWO SERMONS,

BY THE *BISHOP* OF *LANDAFF,*

AND THE

LAST CHAPTER OF PALEY'S EVIDENCES.

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TWO SERMONS

ON THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY JEREMIAH SEED, A. M.

SERMON I.

ON THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

JOHN iii. 2.

Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

THE propoſition contained in the text is, that ſome miracles are ſo circumſtanced, as to be direct evidences of a divine power. By a miracle, is meant an effect evident to the ſenſes, contrary to the fixed and eſtabliſhed courſe of nature. Strange! that man ſhould diſbelieve an operation different from the preſent courſe of nature; when man himſelf, the firſt man, from whom all the reſt deſcended, could not have been brought into being, but by an act of power different from the courſe of nature, as it is now eſtabliſhed. For ſome firſt man there muſt be: and, whoever he was, he muſt be brought upon the theatre of nature without parents, without any ſecond cauſes, by the immediate power and will of the firſt,

or, in other words, by an operation, which, if it were not, ſtrictly ſpeaking, a miracle, was, at leaſt, equivalent to one.

Nor is it at all improbable, that he who called man into being, by a particular diſplay of power, diſtinct from thoſe general laws which obtain at preſent, would exert ſome unuſual and uncommon acts of power for (what was of greater importance than his mere being) his well-being, his eternal well-being.

In the proſecution of this ſubject,

I. I ſhall attempt to ſhew, that ſeveral miracles are deciſive proofs of a divine power.

II. That we have ſufficient evidence, that ſuch miracles were wrought for the confirmation of religion.

I. I ſhall attempt to ſhew, that ſeveral miracles are deciſive proofs of a divine power.

What powers evil ſpirits may have, and what is the utmoſt extent of their abilities, it is beyond the extent of ours, in all caſes, to determine: but that God would ſuffer them to exert thoſe powers in working ſuperior and uncontrolled miracles, this I cannot admit: becauſe God is too good to permit ſuch a ſnare to be laid for the bulk of mankind, who will be always governed more by what affects their ſenſes, than by thoſe arguments which addreſs themſelves coldly to their underſtandings. Striking and pompous miracles, tho' they enforced a doctrine ſeemingly abſurd, would dazzle and overpower

overpower the ſoul, and force an admittance for it into the mind: whereas dry and abſtracted reaſonings operate but ſlowly and languidly in compariſon. He who could raiſe the dead, and ſuſpend the laws of nature, would convince the generality of men much ſooner, than if he brought ſeveral demonſtrations to ſupport what he advanced.

I cannot then believe, that God would permit evil beings to work conſiderable miracles, without aſſerting the ſuperiority of his power; becauſe this would unavoidably miſlead the groſs of the ſpecies into error. I cannot likewiſe believe it, for another reaſon, becauſe it would invalidate and weaken the ſtrongeſt proofs of his providence.

For either we muſt ſay, that no finite effects whatever bear the impreſs of the Deity, and prove an infinite being at the helm, (which is to diſcard all the arguments *a poſteriori*), or ſuch aſtoniſhing notices of power, as our Saviour and Moſes, and others gave, bid as fair for the proof of it, as any phænomena.

For why may we not as well believe, that finite beings are empowered to make the ſun, or other planets, revolve in their orbit, and go their everlaſting round; as that they are empowered to arreſt the courſe of the ſun (or the earth), make it go backwards, or eclipſe it, when the moon is at the full? Let us conſider the caſe of Joſhua ſtopping the ſun. If the laws by which the material world is governed, be nothing, as is generally

agreed, but God's ſtanding and uniform operation upon matter; I aſk, did God ſuſpend his action upon the ſun, when it was ſtopped; or did he not? If he did, then he wrought the miracle; for the miracle was nothing but the ſuſpenſion of the laws of nature: but if he did not, if he ſtill continued his regular action; then it ſeems, there was another being concerned, who over-ruled his power, or at leaſt kept it at bay; and thus polytheiſm will be unavoidable.

The ſame kind of reaſoning may be applied to other miraculous facts. I could as ſoon believe, that evil ſpirits might call me into being, and ſet the ſprings of nature a going at firſt; as that they can raiſe me when dead, reanimate a lump of ſenſeleſs matter, and remand my ſoul, when it is in the hand of God, to its former lodging refitted up. No creature can come into, or be reſtored to being, but by him who is the fountain of all beings.

He that had power to create bread two ſeveral times, to ſatisfy ſome thouſands, might have power to create the whole world; there being no more impoſſibility in the one, than in the other. Either then creative and providential powers are no divine powers; or elſe theſe effects likewiſe bear the ſtamp of the Deity.

If the ſick may be healed, and the deaf made to hear by an inferior being; can *the maimed be made whole*, (Matth. xv. 31.), or a loſt limb reſtored? He, who produced and preſerves

preſerves that infinitely complicated engine, the human body, can alone form or reſtore any member of it. For in each member of it there is a curious interweaving of endleſs fibres, there are continual ſtreams running to and from each part of it, through an infinity of canals, to convey nutrition throughout: each member maintains a conſtant correſpondence with the head and the heart; it is the inſtrument or occaſion of exciting certain ſenſations in the ſoul, and is enabled, by an incredible activity, to execute her orders, as ſoon as ſhe iſſues them out, and wills the motion of the hand or foot, or any other part: a power to be derived only from him, who commands, and it is immediately done.

It may be of ſome importance to inquire, whether it be conſiſtent with God's wiſdom to intruſt any beings, much leſs evil ones, with ſuch ample powers, as to reſerve to himſelf no diſtinctive characters of his own power; whether this be not to give up the moſt valuable branches of his prerogative, and in effect to unking himſelf: whether this would not be the caſe, if evil ſpirits might perform all the miracles recorded from Geneſis to the Apocalypſe. For if no ſuch ſupernatural notices, no ſuch undeniable change of nature, carry evident marks and impreſſions of the Deity; then the conſiſtent uniform workings of God, according to eſtabliſhed laws, cannot prove the Deity; and if they cannot prove it, then we are left, to all appearance, in a fatherleſs

and

and forlorn world. We may then be as ſure that ſuch miracles could be wrought by none but God, as we are, that the world is governed by God.

But farther, the argument for the unity of God is this, that one being is ſufficient to produce all the phænomena in nature, and therefore we have no occaſion to ſuppoſe any more than one: which argument is enforced by the *ſimilis ratio*, analogy, and harmony, which runs throughout nature, as far as the ſphere of our obſervation extends. But, if another being can give as glaring indications of power, in a ſupernatural manner, as are ſhewn in the ordinary courſe of nature, if he can break through that *ſimilis ratio* and harmony; then this argument muſt be diſmiſſed as inconcluſive. For the manifeſtation of two diſtinct equal powers muſt lead us to the acknowledgement of two diſtinct equal beings.

The ſtanding miracle of the ſabbatical or ſeventh year, well deſerves our conſideration; when the land lying uncultivated, the produce of the earth in one year (the ſixth), according to Moſes's promiſe, Lev. xxv. 21. was to be thrice as much as uſual, or proviſion for three years. Now, either this miracle was performed, or not. If not, then the whole body of the Jews muſt have a flagrant proof, that their lawgiver was an impoſtor, and conſequently, muſt have been ſo far from believing him, that they would have been a nation of infidels. Nay, they could not actually have obſerved the

the ſabbatical year, according to his directions, upon a failure of his promiſe. But if this miracle was performed, then it muſt be the Lord's doing: for God would never ſuffer any evil ſpirit, for ſuch a long tract of time, for ſeveral centuries, by an oft-repeated exemplification of his power to do thrice as much in a ſupernatural manner, as he himſelf did in one year, in the ordinary courſe of his providence. It is as certain then, that no ſuch miracles could be wrought by any evil ſpirit; as that there are not two diſtinct independent beings at the helm. Where there is an infinite diſproportion of power between two beings, there muſt be ſome ſufficient marks of diſtinction, to aſcertain, which of them acts. It cannot therefore be impoſſible to hit the dividing point, between the little puny feats of evil ſpirits, and the auguſt diſplay of divine power. But if ſuch an uninterrupted ſeries of unparallelled miracles as our Saviour did, do not point out to us the appropriate enſigns of the Deity; what others can we ſingle out as ſufficiently and peculiarly expreſſive of his Majeſty? The moſt aſtoniſhing idea we can conceive of the moſt aſtoniſhing being that is, is, that he brings about things, by the mere act and *fiat* of his will, without any tedious, ſlow, gradual proceſs; that it is as eaſy for him to effect whatever he wills, as it is to will any effect. But behold another, if he were another, uſurps his ſovereign ſtyle: *I will, be thou clean. Lazarus, come*

come forth: It is ſpoke, it is done; nature hears his voice, and, confeſſing her author, inſtantly obeys the dread command.

Thoſe ſettled and eſtabliſhed rules, by which God governs the material world, being for the general good of the whole, God will never act by particular wills, and miracles in numerous, open, unconteſted inſtances; nor will he ſuffer others to act by them, but for ſome ſuperior and prepollent good, which cannot be attained but by a deviation from the ſettled courſe of nature. Either then the miracles were wrought for ſome ſuperior good, or they were not. If they were, then there is no abſolute neceſſity to ſuppoſe other beings concerned: it was not beneath the Deity to interpoſe; it was no proſtitution of his power and dignity, but an act of condeſcenſion and goodneſs worthy of himſelf. If they were not for ſome prepollent good; then he would not ſuffer them to be wrought at all: ſince if evil beings might, for no prepollent good, interrupt the courſe of nature, and turn things into another channel, all human affairs muſt ſtand ſtill, all our induſtry muſt ſtagnate, and all our prudence be ſuperſeded. For where every thing in the courſe of nature was precarious, where there was no regular conduct or providence; no regular and well-concerted means could be of any ſervice, to procure any deſirable end, or avert any evil. Wiſdom and folly, carefulneſs and idleneſs, would be upon a level, if beings of a ſuperior nature were

were left at large, to diſconcert, unſettle, and embroil every thing. I can eaſily ſee, that God may ſacrifice the uniformity and harmony of his providence, upon ſome uncommon exigency; the love of the happineſs of his creatures being ſuperior to his love of order: but that he ſhould ſuffer a ſet of evil ſpirits to break through that magnificent ſimplicity, and regular variety, which conſtitute beauty; that he ſhould ſuffer an impoſtor to go on in a continued ſeries of unrivalled miracles, to raiſe the dead, and himſelf, to confer the ſame powers on his followers, and to enable them to ſpeak all languages; and all this with a deſign to deceive a ſet of creatures, who may be, and are every day deceived, without the expence of one miracle, is a ſuppoſition highly injurious to the wiſdom of the Deity, which has given things a law, which ſhall not be broken upon every ſlight occaſion. It is in nature, as in a poem: the great author of it may break through ſet formal rules, when a greater beauty may be compaſſed by ſwerving from them, then by ſcrupulouſly adhering to them. But then he will never permit others to break through his regular adjuſtment of things, and blend their own performances promiſcuouſly with his. I grant that evil inviſible beings may be the miniſters of God's vengeance, as well as viſible beings are; nay, they are much properer inſtruments, as their intellects are clearer, their reaſon more extenſive, and their powers more enlarged. But

all

all this may be done conſiſtently with the laws of nature; at leaſt without any notorious uncontrolled breach of them.

To theſe miracles of power we may add prophecies, which are miracles of knowledge. Now, how God himſelf ſhould certainly foreſee uncertain events, is unconceivable by us; but it is abſolutely impoſſible, that any ſuch degree of knowledge ſhould be lodged in finite beings. Yet there are ſeveral ſuch prophecies as ſuppoſe infallible knowledge of contingent events; and conſequently, muſt be aſcribed to God alone. Such is the prophecy about Cyrus by name, and what he would do, above an hundred years before he was born; Iſaiah's prophecy concerning our Saviour's ſufferings, a prophecy ſo very punctual, that if we were not certain of the contrary, one would ſuſpect that the author had lived after our Saviour, and had nothing to do but to adjuſt the pretended prophecy to the event. Such is our Saviour's prediction concerning the unexampled deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the diſperſion of the Jews, 'till *the fulneſs of the Gentiles ſhould come in.*

There then is no queſtion, but, if the miracles were wrought, they were wrought by God himſelf: which brings me to the

II. Point, which was to prove, we have ſufficient evidence the miracles were actually wrought.

And

And in order to this, I need not prove, that the apoſtles could not be deceived themſelves, ſince they were eye-witneſſes of our Saviour's miracles; much leſs could they be deceived, as to the miracles they themſelves performed, particularly as to that of the gift of tongues. For they muſt have had as much an internal conſciouſneſs, that they could on a ſudden underſtand and ſpeak a variety of languages, which they never learned, as they had an internal conſciouſneſs of their own exiſtence. They muſt have an intimate feeling of what paſſed within them.

My buſineſs ſhall be to ſhew,

1*ſt*, That the apoſtles had no intereſt to deceive others: and,

2*dly*, That they could not have deceived mankind if they would.

1*ſt*, Then, I am to prove, that the apoſtles had no intereſt to deceive others.

If Chriſtianity was an impoſture, it was a ſtrange impoſture indeed; an impoſture beneficial to the world, but deſtructive to the authors, in the nature and tendency of the thing itſelf: beneficial, I ſay, to the world, ſince it forbade every vice, and injoined every virtue, that could make a man more happy in himſelf, more ſerviceable to the world, and more acceptable to God: but as viſibly, in its genuine conſequences, deſtructive to the authors; ſince they could not expect to impeach the juſtice of the Jewiſh government, by charging the crime of murder, the murder of the

the *Prince of life*, upon the rulers, to diſturb public ſettlements, and unhinge national religions with impunity; ſince they knew from the indignities their maſter met with, that they were to promote it at the expence of whatever was dear and valuable to them in this life; ſince the Pagan prieſts would every where work up the dregs of the populace into a ferment, againſt the propagators of a religion, which could not take place but at the expence of their intereſt.

It may be ſaid, the apoſtles were actuated by ambition: they were impatient to ſet themſelves above the undiſtinguiſhed many, and to ſhew the ſuperiority of their parts by diſſenting from the common herd.

It is granted, that ambition is ſometimes as predominant in the vulgar, as it is in men of letters, or heroes: but then it operates in a quite different manner, and flows in another channel.

For inſtance, an ignorant peaſant, who has had a narrow and confined education, may be deſirous to be the oracle of the village in which he lives, and to get and maintain an aſcendant over it. This would probably be the height of his ambition: it could never enter into his head, if he were in his ſenſes, without the advantages of a refined converſation, or the knowledge of books, to erect himſelf into a teacher of many nations. The philoſopher indeed might be tempted to enlarge the ſcene of action, and to ſpread his

fame

fame and knowledge throughout the world: but a deſire of diſtinction in poor unlettered men of common ſenſe, is confined within a narrower ſphere, it never prompts them to take the world for their theatre, and mankind for their audience.

If then the apoſtles were men of common ſenſe, which is plain from that excellent ſyſtem of morality, which they have left us, explained in the cleareſt precepts, enforced by the ſtrongeſt motives, and exemplified by the brighteſt pattern; they could not, were their paſſion for glory never ſo ſtrong, merely upon the ſtrength of that motive, have formed a wild romantic project of propagating a new religion among the polite, as well as barbarous nations, without either riches or power to obtrude their ſentiments upon the world, or art and addreſs to inſinuate them.

No, if they had not been ſwayed by a principle of obedience to their Creator, and a well-grounded belief in him, that he would proſper their endeavour; that attempt, *viz.* for a few defenceleſs ignorant men to change the religions of all the earth, by introducing a rational devotion, and a pure morality, had been a kind of religious knight-errantry, which ſome frantic enthuſiaſts might have ſet on foot; but was inconſiſtent with their character, who ſpoke the words of ſoberneſs and truth. Theſe then were the true ſprings of their actions, a ſettled conviction of the truth of the reſurrection, a firm confidence that they repoſed

repoſed in their Maker and Saviour, and a certain expectation of heavenly rewards in reverſion. Had they not believed the truth of the reſurrection, and that God would give a ſanction to it by miracles; vain-glory, it is certain, could not prompt them to embark in an attempt which they could not but foreſee muſt terminate in their diſgrace and defeat; they being in themſelves very incompetent inſtruments, to occaſion ſo great a revolution in religion.

Beſides, it is plain ambition could never have been their motive: had they indeed pretended to preach and write from their own fund of ſenſe, and to ſtrike out an entirely new track of thought, without treading ſervilely in the ſteps of another; then there had been ſome colour for taxing them with vain-glory: but inſtead of this, they diſclaim the vanity of being thought originals: they refer all the glory of being the firſt author of theſe beneficial truths to their Lord and Maſter: he was the maſter-builder who laid the plan; they deſire only to be conſidered as under-agents and workmen; a character, to which ambitious men are not willing to ſtoop: they every where make our Saviour the immediate fountain-head of that knowledge which watered and enriched the world; they only pretend to be the channels, through which it was conveyed.

There are few or no other public actions, but what a witty malice may put ſome ſiniſter interpretation

interpretation upon; and the beſt deeds in appearance may, and often, no queſtion, do proceed from a principle of vanity: but the actions of the apoſtles will ſtand the teſt of the ſevereſt ſcrutiny. For they could not act upon any indirect and intereſted views of worldly honour, ambition, or gain; they muſt have been ſupported by a determined reſolution of mind, to bear the utmoſt preſſures of miſery and torment, in the cauſe of truth, founded upon a proſpect of future happineſs. So far are they from conſulting the dignity of human nature who deny the truth of Chriſtianity, that they do what in them lies, to rob us of the moſt inconteſtable examples of human virtue, and conſequently to depretiate our nature.

It is objected indeed, whereas the primitive witneſſes ſealed their teſtimony with their blood; that conſideration does not weigh much, ſince ſeveral criminals have perſiſted to the laſt in the denial of known facts.

To this I anſwer, that theſe wretches generally do it with the proſpect of a pardon or a reprieve. But pray, which of theſe hardened creatures would perſevere to atteſt what he knew to be falſe, provided a pardon was offered, if he would confeſs the truth? Yet this was the caſe of the apoſtles: they might at any time have preſerved their lives, by laying open the cheat, if it had been one: nay, in the firſt council, that of the Jews, before which they were convened, all that

was

was deſired of them was, that they ſhould preach no more in the name of Jeſus.

He that can produce one inſtance of a man that would rather part with his life, than retract what he knew to be falſe, when he might ſave his life by retracting, muſt find ſome hiſtory as yet unknown to the learned world. Much leſs can a number of ſuch men be produced, who all with an inflexible ſtubbornneſs, with an unconquerable ſpirit, were conſiſtent from firſt to laſt, 'till death cloſed the ſcene, without one of them throwing off the maſk. I have often heard that terrors and torments have made a man abjure what he knew to be true; but I never heard, that they had ſomething ſo inviting in them, as to make a man, much leſs a number of men, maintain what they were conſcious was a falſehood, a falſehood unprofitable to them, when they might have been reſcued from death by recanting. There is then this material difference: criminals either, in the firſt place, falſify with an intention to ſave themſelves from the ſtroke of juſtice: whereas the apoſtles brought their lives, knowingly and wilfully, into imminent danger; nay, actually loſt them, for nothing but perſevering to atteſt the truth, unawed by any terrors, unallured by hopes of pardon: or ſecondly, malefactors have died, as they lived, under an inſenſibility of each good and virtuous impreſſion. Groſs and heavy minds, that think of nothing in this world but what ſtrikes their ſenſes, may

may think of nothing beyond this world: but the apoſtles muſt have lived an exemplary life, and in an uninterrupted tenour of virtue. For a profligate and immoral life would have blaſted their credit as much, as the detection of a notorious falſehood. And it is not to be ſuppoſed, that men of exemplary lives, who in their writings inculcate the juſteſt, and therefore the nobleſt ſentiments of the Deity, and a ſtrict regard to truth, would die with a falſehood in their mouths.

I own that enthuſiaſm will put men upon deſperate attempts. But then the apoſtles could not have been enthuſiaſts. For they muſt have had an abſolute certainty, whether our Saviour was riſen, after ſuch oft-repeated, laſting, ſenſible evidence of his being alive, after having ſeen, handled, and felt him: they muſt be intimately conſcious (the higheſt degree of certainty) whether they could ſpeak all languages, agreeably to his promiſe after his riſing from the dead, *viz.* that they ſhould *be endued with power from on high.* If they then aſſerted theſe things without any foundation, they knew what they aſſerted to be falſe. Now, he is not an enthuſiaſt, who aſſerts what he knows to be falſe; he is ſomething worſe.

That charge being diſmiſſed, the only tolerable motive that can be aſſigned, is that of vain-glory, which I have already diſproved. For it is plain to the force of a demonſtration, that they were not influenced by other worldly views, when they knew, that renouncing eaſe

and pleaſure, their country and friends, they were to face poverty, bonds, and death, under their moſt forbidding and frightful appearances. *I think*, ſays St Paul, *that God hath ſet forth us the apoſtles laſt, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a ſpectacle to the world, and unto angels and men.—Even unto this preſent hour we both hunger and thirſt, and are naked and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place, and labour working with our own hands; we are reviled, perſecuted, and defamed; we are made as the filth of the world, and the off-ſcouring of all things.* 1 Cor. iv. 9. *&c.*

Hear what Clemens Romanus, contemporary with the apoſtles, ſays, in his firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians, the moſt valuable monument of Chriſtian antiquity, next to the inſpired writings. "It was of unjuſt envy, that Peter "ſuffered, not one or two, but ſeveral pains; "and having undergone martyrdom, is gone "into the place of glory, which was due to "him. It is out of envy" (continues the ſame author) "that Paul got the prize of "patience, having been put ſeven times in "irons, ſtoned, and ſcourged; being the he-"rald of the goſpel in the eaſt and weſt, he "made his faith famous. Having taught the "whole world juſtice, and being come to the "extremity of the weſt, when he had ſuffered "martyrdom before the chief of the ſtate, he "went out of the world *." Theſe are the words

* Cotelerii patres apoſtolici, vol. 1. pag. 150. 151.

words of an author, who had no temptations to falſify, and living in the ſame age with the apoſtles, could not want an opportunity to inform himſelf of the truth of what he delivers. Since then the apoſtles were not ſwayed by vain-glory, or other worldly conſiderations; they muſt have been either acted by a diſintereſted love of pain and miſery, contrary to the known workings of human nature, contrary to the firſt principle, that of ſelf-preſervation, and an invincible deſire of happineſs; or they muſt have been ſwayed by a ſettled conviction of the truth of the reſurrection, and animated by the hopes of an everlaſting weight of glory. Theſe are the only aſſignable ſprings of action.

Diſbelievers would be thought to be great patrons of ſocial morality: but one cannot well conceive how ſociety, and conſequently ſocial morality, can ſubſiſt upon their principles, which are fruitful of diſtruſt and jealouſy. They who can impiouſly believe the apoſtles to have been deceivers and knaves, muſt, if conſiſtent with themſelves, believe every one elſe to be ſo too, as far as he has capacity and opportunity. They who can entertain a doubt of the apoſtles honeſty, after the ſtrongeſt proofs of their integrity, that they could poſſibly give, or mankind require, muſt entertain a general undiſtinguiſhing ſuſpicion of every perſon about them.

Add to this, that a vein of ſimplicity runs throughout their whole compoſure, and nature,

void of art, ſpeaks in every line. And whatever critical ſkill and accuracy in languages they might want, they every where ſeem to ſpeak, what is more eſtimable than all the languages beſides, the language of the heart: they never caſt in ſhades, what might appear too bold, glaring, and incredible at the firſt tranſient view: they never ſmooth the way and prepare the reader, for what might ſeem offenſive: they every where leave the actions to ſpeak, and their readers to judge, for themſelves. Plain honeſt truth wants no artificial colourings; and falſehood is apt to betray itſelf, by laying them on too thick. Truth ſhines with unborrowed beauties, and has no need of foreign ornaments: but on falſehood, which has no comelineſs in itſelf, men beſtow the more abundant comelineſs. Here they laviſh out all their art, prodigal of decorations, to divert the eye from attending to its genuine deformity.

The evidence ſtill riſes higher, if we conſider that the truth of the miraculous facts in ſcripture-hiſtory, is proved by events ſubſequent to them; which events, *viz.* the propagation and eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity, could never have taken place, unleſs the miraculous facts had been true: for it was as impoſſible, that *the twelve apoſtles* ſhould propagate Chriſtianity, againſt the united forces of Jews and Gentiles, magiſtrates and philoſophers, as *that twelve unarmed men ſhould defeat the whole Roman army.* The relation therefore which the ſcripture gives us of miracles, muſt be

be true: becauſe, without a ſuppoſition of miracles actually performed, we cannot rationally account for *that great turn in religious affairs, which not very long after followed, viz.* the ſubverſion of Pagan idolatry in part, and the introduction of the worſhip of God in ſpirit and in truth.

But this argument for the truth of Chriſtianity falls under my next head, and muſt be reſerved for another diſcourſe.

SERMON. II.

ON THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

JOHN iii. 2.

Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do theſe miracles that thou doſt, except God be with him.

I Have already proved in a former diſcourſe, that miracles may be ſo circumſtanced, as to be direct and deciſive evidences of a divine power and commiſſion.—That it was abſolutely impoſſible the apoſtles ſhould be deceived themſelves, as witneſſes of our Saviour's miracles and their own.—That it was morally impoſſible they ſhould attempt to deceive others.—The ſubject of my preſent diſcourſe is to prove, that the apoſtles could not have deceived

deceived mankind, if they would: nor have impoſed a falſe religion upon the world, by virtue of a pretended commiſſion from heaven.

If the Chriſtian religion, containing doctrines unpalatable to fleſh and blood, void of every advantage, beſides its own internal excellency, to recommend it, and clogged with a great many incumbrances, could carry conviction with it from eaſt to weſt, by ſuch incompetent inſtruments, in ſo ſhort a time, in ſpite of the moſt reſolved oppoſition: if this plant, from a ſlender appearance at firſt, grew, and waxed a great tree, when no kindly ſunſhine of worldly power yet ſmiled upon it; nay, when the inclemency of the ſeaſon beat hard againſt it; the growth of it was undoubtedly marvellous.

It is granted, that in matters of pure ſpeculation, the bulk of mankind may be, and often are, deceived; becauſe they have not leiſure or capacity, to unravel ſtudied ſophiſtry, and nicely to diſtinguiſh between what is plauſible, and what is ſolid and ſubſtantial: but the caſe is different as to miracles, which are matters of fact, that fall under the cogniſance of our ſenſes. Here the vulgar and the learned are equally competent judges, and you can perſuade neither of them to believe he ſees a glaring fact, which he does not actually behold. Either then the apoſtles wrought ſuch matters of fact, or they did not. If they did, then they were inveſted with a power from God: for evil ſpirits would not, if they could, em-

power

power them to beat down idolatry: if they did not, then it is unaccountable, how a ſet of fiſhermen, deſpiſed for their poverty, and odious upon the account of their nation, ſhould propagate through many nations, not to ſay the whole known world, ſuch an unlikely ſtory as this, *viz.* That one who was crucified as a common malefactor in Judæa, was to be adored as a God; and that too, at ſuch a juncture of time, when their numerous converts in ſeveral parts of the world, ſome of whom were men of known diſtinction and opulency, (ſuch as Dionyſius of the Areopagus, Joſeph of the Jewiſh ſanhedrim, Sergius Paulus a proconſul, Flavius Clemens a Roman conſul, &c.), who had, very probably, enjoyed one continued ſunſhine of proſperity; muſt bid adieu to all the blandiſhments of life, undergo whatever is diſtaſteful to human nature, and either ſuffer, or be in danger of ſuffering martyrdom.

I would gladly have the Deiſts try the experiment: let them ſend the ableſt they can ſingle out of their numerous fraternity to broach ſuch a like ſtory: for inſtance, that one, who ſuffered in England for a malefactor, is riſen from the dead, and is to be worſhipped as the ſaviour of mankind: let them ſend them to Portugal or Spain, where the inquiſition reigns, and where as exquiſite tortures will be applied to them as were to the promitive martyrs. It is eaſy to ſee the conſequence: they themſelves would meet with a very warm

reception;

reception; but their doctrine with a very cold one: both would be involved in the ſame doom, both periſh and come to naught. If then the apoſtles had not a power of working genuine miracles, and diſplaying the ampleſt credentials of divine power; it will be the greateſt miracle of all, that without either riches to bribe, authority to awe, or acquired knowledge and dexterity to over-reach men into a compliance with their notions, they ſhould pave the way to ſo general and *great a turn in religious affairs*; when theſe boaſted maſters of reaſon, the Deiſts, theſe men of large views, who by an uncommon ſuperiority of the ſoul have diſengaged themſelves from the prejudices of education, would not be able to bring over a majority of men, nay, perhaps, not one man of common ſenſe in any one nation; if they ſhould ſet on foot ſuch another unpromiſing project.

Let us ſuppoſe, that a perſon in our days ſhould embark in a deſign of cancelling all the old religions, and building a new one upon their ruins; that, to compaſs this deſign, he pretended to raiſe the dead, make the blind ſee, the lame walk, the deaf hear, *&c.* that not long after his death, his followers publiſh a punctual circumſtantial relation of all theſe things, mentioning the places where, the perſons upon whom, the witneſſes before whom theſe miracles were ſaid to be wrought: let us put the caſe, that they too pretended to have the ſame miraculous powers veſted in them,

and

and that their doctrine gained footing every where, not only in England, but in foreign countries: would the magiſtracy, and thoſe whoſe intereſt was at ſtake, remain unactive in ſuch a critical juncture, and ſuffer the people to be ſeduced by ſuch overbearing pretenſions? No, certainly they would ſend, which might be eaſily done, to the places where, the perſons upon whom, and the witneſſes before whom thoſe aſtoniſhing notices of divine power were ſaid to be diſplayed: they would take down the depoſitions of creditable and ſubſtantial witneſſes in every place, that the dead were not raiſed, nor the ſick cured there, nor thouſands fed in a miraculous manner, *&c.* they would circulate and diſperſe theſe atteſtations, and ſend the antidote, where-ever the infection was ſpread.

Now I aſk, did the Jewiſh and Pagan magiſtracy and prieſthood, upon the firſt publication of the facts, when the goſpel began to ſpread, take theſe eaſy meaſures, which common ſenſe ſuggeſted, to ſuppreſs Chriſtianity, and confront its evidence? If they did, then Chriſtianity muſt have been ſtifled and overlaid in its infancy, by the weight of ſeveral thouſands of diſintereſted witneſſes, giving it under their hands, that no ſuch glaring actions were publicly done. This, I ſay, muſt have been the conſequence, if the facts had been falſe; eſpecially when all the engines of worldly power were applied againſt it. If they did not take this eaſy method, they virtually and implicitly owned the truth

of

of the facts: they confeſſed the world was not deceived; becauſe, if it had been ſo, they neither wanted power nor inclination to undeceive it.

But it is objected, that ſuch accounts were publiſhed, which the Chriſtians, when they got the power into their hands, wiſely took care to ſuppreſs. To which I anſwer: When did the Chriſtians get the power into their hands? Why, after Chriſtianity had ſtood the ſhock, and outlived the rage of ten long perſecutions. But this does not at all invalidate what I ſaid, *viz.* that Chriſtianity muſt have been overlaid in its infancy, by the weight of authentic accounts, well atteſted againſt its truth: whereas then it was too late; it had taken the deeper root, by weathering out the ſtorm. Beſides, this is *gratis dictum*; there are no traces left of any books, that ever denied the facts; no mention of them occurs any where. We have indeed ſome remains of Celſus, Hierocles, Porphyry, and Julian, declared enemies to Chriſtianity. But what they allege does not amount to a denial of the facts: ſo far are they from that, that they aſcribe the miracles of our Saviour to magic, and the Jews in the Talmud, juſt as their forefathers do in the New Teſtament, to a correſpondence or intercourſe with the devil.

To account for the riſe and propagation of Chriſtianity, our adverſaries have recourſe to falſe miracles, which they ſay are very common among Chriſtians. By Chriſtians here they mean

mean the Papiſts: but if Popiſh prieſts chuſe to act their pretended miracles in by-places, in cloyſters, or at leaſt only before men of their own perſuaſion, where they have the power in their hands, to fence off an impartial inquiry into them; and yet their pious frauds have been generally detected: if notwithſtanding their confeſſed depth of art and fineſſe to execute a well-concerted project, they have never attempted to do a wonder in the eye of a Proteſtant nation, before a great concourſe of heretics, as they call us; then I deſire to know how a ſet of unpoliſhed men, unpractiſed in ſtudied wiles and myſterious frauds, ſhould audaciouſly and ſucceſsfully carry on a flagrant cheat, in the eye of thouſands of its moſt inveterate foes, the prieſts and rulers of the Jewiſh nation, and indeed the rulers and prieſts of every other nation, who wanted neither diſcernment enough to unmaſk and expoſe it, if it had been ſuch, nor power to cruſh and ſtifle it. This, I ſay, was impoſſible, if their miracles had been impoſtures, and therefore they were not ſo. And ſince the diſcovery of impoſtures has ſtaggered the faith of ſome weak men, and made them look upon Chriſtianity in the ſame diſadvantageous light; I will venture to ſay, that the more numerous the impoſtures are, which are diſcovered; the more Chriſtianity is confirmed thereby: becauſe it proves, that no impoſture can ſtand the teſt of a ſevere examination, when men of power and policy vigorouſly intereſt themſelves

ſelves in the detection of it, and are reſolved to go to the bottom of it. Impoſtures need only to be held up to the light, to be ſeen through; but Chriſtianity, the more thoroughly it was canvaſſed, and the more vigorouſly it was oppoſed, the more it gained footing in the world. There is then this difference between an impoſture and a genuine miracle. The former loves obſcurity, the latter is deſirous to be ſet in the ſtrongeſt point of view, and challenges the neareſt inſpection, of the moſt penetrating judge.

Beſides, Tacitus, an Heathen hiſtorian, aſſures us, that in Nero's reign, but thirty years after our Saviour's reſurrection, there was *(ingens multitudo)* a prodigious multitude of Chriſtians at Rome, above two thouſand miles from Jeruſalem; that Nero inflicted upon them the moſt exquiſite puniſhments; and particularly, that they were burnt to give light in the ſtreets, when day-light failed.

What ſhall we ſay as to that prodigious multitude, who, in Nero's reign, were faithful unto death, unwearied by toils, unſhaken by miſery, and undiſmayed by terrors, even by death the king of terrors? They could not be miſtaken, ſince they who converſed with the apoſtles, muſt know, whether they made good their pretenſions to a miraculous power or not; or, in other words, whether they were impoſtors, or perſons commiſſioned by God. Did they then wilfully conſpire to impoſe upon others? Upon what motives?

That

That of vain-glory? No, certainly. The great leaders of parties may ſometimes expect to be tranſmitted down to poſterity, with marks of honour, and to leave behind them a bright and laſting track of glory. But their numerous retinue of followers muſt expect to die unnoticed, as they lived unknown: each of them will be loſt in the croud, like ſo many ciphers, undiſtinguiſhed, and of no conſideration or moment, any farther than they contribute to make the principal figure, which was placed at the head of them, more conſiderable. Now, that men ſhould give up the moſt weighty and valuable conſiderations of this life; nay, life itſelf, for invaluable rewards in heaven, and for *an exceeding weight of glory*; that they ſhould ſuſpend all deſire of applauſe, 'till they received the ineſtimable applauſe of their Creator——this is eaſily accounted for. But that men *ſhould give up their all here, for nothing in reverſion*; that they ſhould reſign life itſelf, without even expecting that imaginary life, a great name after death, merely *to atteſt and ſupport an unprofitable falſehood*—this is highly incredible, abſurd, and impoſſible.

I grant, that ſeveral may die martyrs for an opinion that is falſe; becauſe, though it be falſe, they may be perſuaded it is true. But miracles, upon which Chriſtianity is founded, are matters of fact, of which the early followers of the apoſtles muſt have been eye-witneſſes. And nobody ever *died to aſſert an untruth in matters of fact*, as to which he could

could not be deceived, ſuppoſing *the truth of his ſenſes:* though ſeveral have died, rather than renounce opinions, the falſity of which they had not judgment enough to diſcover. Much leſs can it be imagined, that, under the early perſecutions of Nero and Domitian, many thouſands of Chriſtians would go on in an uninterrupted track *of falſifying wilfully, at the expence of their lives;* without one of them, even in the article of death, deviating into truth.

The numerous converts to Chriſtianity in the firſt century, could not have believed it to be true, if it had been falſe. For they muſt have had an inward conſciouſneſs, whether they had received thoſe miraculous gifts or not, for the abuſe and miſapplication of which St Paul in his firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians cenſures and reproves them. They muſt have had an abſolute certainty, ſuppoſing no extraordinary gifts were communicated to them, that he, from whom they received their religion, and whoſe epiſtles, as appears from St Peter and others, were univerſally read as of divine authority, was a ſhameleſs impoſtor. And yet they could not have profeſſed the belief of it, knowing it to be an impoſture, at a time, when Chriſtians were *of all men moſt miſerable*, without any proſpect of worldly honour and advantage, but with a certain expectation of exquiſite torments; except upon a ſuppoſition that they loved miſery and hated happineſs as ſuch.

Pliny

Pliny, a perſon of unſuſpected veracity, in the reign of Trajan, not ſeventy years after the reſurrection, in a letter to the emperor, informs him that where he was governor in Bithynia, a place above twelve hundred miles from Jeruſalem the neareſt way; to arrive at which you muſt travel through ſeveral nations, of different languages, Syrians, Pamphylians, Carians, Lycians, *&c.* Chriſtianity had ſo far prevailed, that "the temples of the gods "were almoſt deſolated, their ſacred rites a "long time intermitted; and there were very "few that would buy any ſacrifices, notwith-"ſtanding great ſeverities were inflicted upon "Chriſtians of every rank, ſex, and age."

Juſtin Martyr, who lived in the ſame century, informs us, in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, that there was no nation in the known world, where ſome did not pray to God in the name of Jeſus Chriſt. What ſhall we ſay then? that the apoſtles travelled from one end of the earth to the other, without underſtanding the languages of ſeveral nations? Then it would have been impoſſible to have made any converts, by ſpeaking to them in an unknown tongue. Or ſhall we ſay, that men bred up in low employments had a vaſt variety of languages at command? That would have been almoſt impoſſible, if they had made it the whole buſineſs of their lives. In ſhort, there is no other way of accounting for it, but by inſpiration: they could not acquire them; they muſt be the gift of God. And

when

when I conſider, that they enlightened as many nations with a rational devotion, and ſound morality, as Alexander ravaged by the force of arms; that they did more in one century to diſabuſe the world, and reſcue it from human ſacrifices, and to propagate beneficial truth, than the philoſophers had done for many ages: I think, what was a mere compliment, when applied to a certain great hero, is but ſtrict juſtice done to them, *viz.* that they were the inſtruments *in tantis rebus gerendis, quantas audere vix hominis; perficere nullius niſi Dei*, "in bringing thoſe things to "bear, which merely to attempt was more "than human; but to perform was certainly "God-like and divine." That the apoſtles, though low, ſhould overcome the great; and though ignorant, ſhould teach the wiſe; can only be aſcribed to him, who has *choſen the weak things of this world to confound the mighty.*

Beſides, ſuppoſing the apoſtles had aſſerted without any foundation, that at the death of our Saviour, when the moon was at the full, and conſequently there could be no natural eclipſe, yet there was a ſupernatural one, and a darkneſs of three hours continuance; that in the metropolis of the nation, the partition of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom; that the graves were opened, and the dead appeared in the heart of the nation; that fifty days after, at the ſolemnity of Pentecoſt, to celebrate which people reſorted from

from different parts of the world, there was a deſcent of fiery tongues upon them, by virtue of which, ſeveral, who, it could be proved, knew no tongue but their native one, were empowered to converſe publicly with men of different nations, in their own language: ſuppoſe, I ſay, they ſhould have aſſerted theſe things without any foundation, could they have perſuaded one man to have ſwallowed ſuch crude glaring falſehoods in matters of fact, and make him believe he ſaw what he never did, a ſupernatural eclipſe, and heard what he did not, the miracle of tongues? If they could, I ſhould not know which moſt to wonder at, their modeſty in aſſerting ſuch notorious untruths, or his underſtanding in believing them. Thus their ſtory would have been an empty bubble, which muſt have ſunk and vaniſhed, almoſt as ſoon as it roſe. That ſingle fact of the miraculous eclipſe, if falſe, muſt have proved a millſtone about the neck of it, and ſunk it irretrievably. It put it in the power of man, woman, and child, to diſprove their relation: every one would tell them, ſuch a thing muſt be notorious and viſible to the whole world, which yet had eſcaped their notice, and that of every one elſe they knew. They could not then have impoſed upon the age in which they lived.

The only thing that can be ſuppoſed, is, that the ſtory might be put upon after ages, at ſome diſtant period of time.

Place then the date and riſe of Chriſtianity at what period of time you pleaſe; could the propagators of it perſuade any people to believe ſuch a ſtory of public notorious facts, which they never heard of before, without foundation or evidence? No certainly, if they ſhould tell us, that, to perpetuate the memory of theſe actions, the hiſtory of them had been written by eye-witneſſes, public ſacraments appointed, weekly and annual feſtivals celebrated from that time to this, and a church founded, againſt which *the gates of hell never could prevail.* For then the ſtory would carry its own confutation along with it, and they might have as well attempted to make people believe they heard ignorant men ſpeak all manner of languages, or ſaw our Saviour raiſe the dead; as that there was then in being a church, againſt which the gates of hell never had prevailed; in which theſe feſtivals had been always obſerved, and theſe ſacraments always kept up. The cry would have been, What is become of your church, which was to be impregnable as a rock, and laſting as the ſun?—Is it become an inviſible church indeed? *Out of your own mouths will we condemn you: what need we farther witneſſes?* Now, would any nation, diſcarding the religion which they had been bred up in, admit a new one in its ſtead, upon the account of ſuch a groundleſs ſelf-contradictory ſtory? What would they ſay, could ſuch glaring and notorious facts, which muſt have alarmed the whole world, like the

ſailing of a ſhip, leave no traces behind them of their exiſtence in hiſtory? In ſhort, ſuch unſupported and overgrown falſehood muſt have fallen to the ground by its own unwieldly bulk, without any one to overturn it.

To apply this to Chriſtianity in general: If the marvellous facts were not true, the books which contain them, could never have been received, nor the feſtivals and obſervances which commemorate them, have taken place in that age in which they were ſaid to be done; —becauſe it was then in every body's power to diſprove them. They could not, in any after ages, have been impoſed upon mankind: becauſe though abſurdities may be grafted upon an old religion, yet no nation ever did, or will, voluntarily embrace a religion entirely new, without any evidence. And it is certain, they were not thus impoſed upon mankind long after; becauſe it appears by uncontradicted written traditions, that theſe actions, auguſt ceremonies, and feſtivals, did commence at the period aſſigned, and have flowed down from the firſt fountain-head to the preſent age, in one uninterrupted ſtream.

To apply this to the truth of the reſurrection in particular: The apoſtolical age could not be deceived by a ſham ſtory of a reſurrection, becauſe our Saviour's reſurrection was as public and notorious, as his death and crucifixion, though not in itſelf, yet in its immediate conſequences, I mean thoſe miracles wrought before thouſands, by eye-witneſſes, to confirm

the truth of it. Was it then ſet on foot in ſome after ages? No, becauſe both the weekly and yearly memorials of it are of as old a date as Chriſtanity itſelf, and, from the firſt propagation of it, have been ſucceſſively handed down to us. That Sunday was the weekly memorial of it, even in the apoſtolical age, is plain from St. John, who ſays, that *he was in the ſpirit on the Lord's day*, or the day then ſet apart to commemorate the Lord's reſurrection. And that there was an annual memorial of it, inſtituted by the apoſtles, and continued down to us, is plain from the early diſputes about the preciſe time on which it was to be obſerved; though the obſervation of Eaſter, as an apoſtolical inſtitution, was never controverted. In ſhort, the hiſtory of the goſpel has all the teſtimony, that any antient matter of fact ever had; and it has, beſides, ſeveral material evidences, which other antient matters of fact have not. For are there any other ancient matters of fact, which were atteſted, by eye-witneſſes, who expected nothing in this life but miſeries and hardſhips for their atteſtations; who were ready to lay down their lives for the truth of what they ſaid; who could not be deceived themſelves, had no intereſt to deceive others, nor could have deceived them if they would? Are there ſtanding monuments, and ſenſible obſervations, appointed to keep up the memory of other ancient matters of fact, commencing from the time in which the actions were done, and from thence

thence, as from the firſt link, deſcending to poſterity in one continual chain? Did any religion beſides conquer by ſuffering, and by having its thouſands and ten thouſands ſlain? —Or did any beſides, though its inſtruments were vaſtly unequal to the taſk, bear down all oppoſition, and triumph over the rage of the Jews, the learning of the philoſophers, the power of the emperors, and the prejudices and paſſions of all mankind?

If Chriſtianity was an impoſture, it was an impoſture *ſui generis*, a pure original, imitating no impoſture that ever was heard of before, and which no impoſture, I dare ſay, will ever after venture to imitate: an impoſture, in which there could be no prieſtcraft; for the prieſts, by profeſſing and propagating it, expoſed themſelves to ſuperior tortures; they ſtood in the front of the battle, and were ſure to fall the firſt, and the biſhop generally ended in the martyr: an impoſture in which there could be no ſtate-craft; for all the ſtates of the world for three hundred years were combined againſt it.

So ſtrong, in ſhort, if we take the arguments from prophecy, the internal excellency of Chriſtianity, and the neceſſity of a revelation into the account, is the evidence for Chriſtianity, that it is the laſt thing I ſhould believe, that an inquiſitive unprejudiced man, of a ſound head, and an upright heart, could be a determined infidel. Nothing ought to be admitted in bar to ſuch pregnant proofs, but

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ſome abſolute impoſſibility in the nature of the thing: mere difficulties weigh nothing: for at that rate we muſt diſbelieve every thing in nature; every thing in nature being attended with great, nay inſuperable difficulties.

Could we ſuppoſe a being in ſome other part of the wide creation, of the ſame ſize of underſtanding with ourſelves, but an entire ſtranger to the natural hiſtory of the world; ſhould any one inform him of the amazing properties of the load-ſtone, the phænomena of light and colours, the circulation of the blood contrary to all the known laws of motion, the revolutions of the planets, the coheſion of matter, the infinite diviſibility of finite matter, nay, of the leaſt grain of that finite matter, the ſurpriſing effects of chemiſtry, he would think the hiſtory of nature far more unaccountable, than any Deiſt can the book of grace, and the hiſtory of the Bible.

Poor ſhort-ſighted creatures! The leaſt grain of ſand is able to baffle the fineſt underſtanding: and yet we would pretend to ſound the depths of the divine nature and counſels; never conſidering, what has been often obſerved, that, "if what was revealed concerning "God, were always adapted to our compre-"henſion; how could it with any fitneſs re-"preſent that nature, which we allow to be "incomprehenſible?" We need not to ranſack the ſcriptures for difficulties: every thing about us and within us, above us and beneath us, convinces us, that we are ignorant; and,

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if once we come to a reſolution to quit what is clear (ſuch are the proofs for Chriſtianity) upon the account of what is obſcure; we ſhall run into univerſal ſcepticiſm. We will not believe, that the Deity does or diſcovers any thing marvellous and unaccountable in an unuſual and ſupernatural manner, though every thing that he does in the common road of providence, be marvellous and unaccountable to us.

Though men may diſagree about matters of pure abſtract reaſoning; yet every reaſonable man is determined by the evidences for matters of fact, when they amount to a moral certainty; unleſs it be in caſes, where the paſſions intereſt themſelves, and indiſpoſe the mind for the reception of truth. Every intelligent perſon, after examination, muſt judge alike in theſe matters; except his judgment be overruled, and his aſſent obſtructed by ſome wrong affection, by ſome ſtrong bias, and ſome inſuperable prejudice, perhaps unſuſpected by himſelf: otherwiſe a man might ſeriouſly diſpute, whether Julius Cæſar made a deſcent upon England, conquered Pompey, and was ſtabbed in the ſenate-houſe; which no man in his ſenſes ever did, or ever will do. Either then it muſt be maintained, contrary to what I have already proved, that the evidences of Chriſtianity do not amount to a moral certainty; or, if they do, it will be difficult to aſſign a reaſon, why clear, ſtrong, and indubitable proofs ſhould not have as much force

force and weight in the affair of religion, as they have in all others; unleſs we may ſuppoſe there is ſomething amiſs within, ſome latent diſingenuity of temper, which here, though not in other caſes, ſhuts up all the avenues by which light can find an entrance.

Though we have not a ſcientifical infallible certainty of the truth of Chriſtianity; yet we have an infallible certainty, that we ought to be determined by ſuch evidences, as Chriſtianity is ſurrounded with: becauſe either we muſt act upon ſuch evidence in the daily courſe of life, or remain in a ſtate of utter inaction. He that will not admit moral certainty to be a ſufficient principle of action; if his practice be conformable to his perſuaſion, muſt neither eat nor drink, till he has a mathematical demonſtration, that what he eats and drinks will prove wholeſome; he will be ſure of nothing in this world, but that he muſt, by acting up to ſuch a notion, depart ſpeedily out of it. If we have a moral certainty of the truth of Chriſtianity; if every unprejudiced mind is determined by moral certainty, we muſt argue thus.—It is demonſtrably certain, that there is a being of infinite goodneſs, truth, and veracity.—It is demonſtrably certain, that a being of infinite goodneſs, truth, and veracity, will not miſlead his creatures into unavoidable errors, nor ſuffer an impoſture to paſs upon the world, in his name, in a matter of the leaſt importance, with ſuch manifeſt tokens of credibility, and moral certainty,

ty, as muſt, and do in every other caſe determine an unprejudiced mind:—therefore it is demonſtrably certain, that Chriſtianity is no impoſture. Thus the Chriſtian faith, in the laſt reſort, reſolves itſelf into, and terminates in the divine veracity: it is as ſure as that God cannot lie, that he who has laid his creatures under an obligation to act upon moral evidence, would not have done ſo, if ſuch ſtrong evidence could ever inevitably deceive them in an affair of infinite concernment.

ATHEISM

ATHEISM AND INFIDELITY REFUTED, IN TWO SERMONS

BY *RICHARD WATSON*, LORD BISHOP OF LANDAFF.

SERMON I.

COL. ii. 8.

Beware leſt any man ſpoil you through philoſophy.

THIS apoſtolic admonition is peculiarly applicable to the age in which we live. It has been called—the age of philoſophy—the age of reaſon: if by reaſon and philoſophy, irreligion be underſtood, it undoubtedly merits the appellation; for there never was an age ſince the death of Chriſt, never one ſince the commencement of the hiſtory of the world, in which atheiſm and infidelity have been more generally profeſſed. Nature and reaſon have been proclaimed as gods, feſtivals have been inſtituted in honour of abſtract ideas, and all revealed religion has been ſcoffingly rejected as a ſyſtem of ſtate-craft,

craft and prieſtcraft, as a groſs impoſition on the underſtanding of mankind.

This impious fever of the mind, this paralyſis of human intellect, originated in a neighbouring nation; it's contagion has been induſtriouſly introduced, and is rapidly ſpreading in our own: it becomes us all in our ſeveral ſtations to endeavour to ſtop it's progreſs; for of this we may all be well aſſured, that when religion ſhall have loſt it's hold on men's conſciences, government will loſe it's authority over their perſons, and a ſtate of barbarous anarchy will enſue.

I know it has been made a queſtion both in ancient and modern times—whether a ſociety of atheiſts could ſubſiſt. This is no queſtion with me, I think it could not.—Many ſpeculative opinions, in every ſyſtem of religion, are of little conſequence to the ſafety of the community, and, in all well regulated ſtates, they are left to the free diſcuſſion of thoſe, who think themſelves intereſted, as advocates for truth, in defending or oppoſing them; but atheiſm ſeems to be irreconcileably hoſtile, not only to the peace, but to the very exiſtence of civil ſociety. If there be no God, there can be no puniſhment for any crime, except what is denounced againſt it by the laws of the land, or what is connected with it by the laws of nature; and theſe are reſtraints incapable of controuling the ſelfiſh and licentious paſſions of human kind. He who removes

moves from the mind of man the hopes and fears of futurity, opens the floodgates of immorality, and lets in a deluge of vices and crimes, deſtructive alike of the dignity of human nature, and of the tranquillity of the world. There never yet hath exiſted, and there never can exiſt a nation without religion. If Chriſtianity be aboliſhed, paganiſm, mahometaniſm, ſome religious impoſture or other muſt be introduced in its ſtead, or civil ſociety muſt be given up. But in the opinion of *Bacon*, (a philoſopher with whom our modern philoſophers cannot be compared) "there hath not in any age been diſcovered any philoſophy, opinion, religion, law, or diſcipline, which ſo greatly exalts the common, and leſſens individual intereſt, as the chriſtian religion doth;" ſo that I know not which moſt to admire and deplore, their wickedneſs as men, or their weakneſs as ſtateſmen, who have attempted to govern mankind without religion, and to eſtabliſh ſociety on the ruins of chriſtianity.

The time, uſually allotted to diſcourſes from this place, will not allow me to refute, at length, the atheiſtical tenets, or to anſwer the deiſtic objections, which have been ſo recently propagated to the downfall of one nation, and to the danger of all; I will, however, crave your patience, whilſt I ſtate ſome arguments of importance, in oppoſition to the principles of thoſe philoſophers, who have been the authors of this miſchief in a foreign

foreign country, and of their admirers in our own.

Nature and reaſon, they tell us, are their gods. Let them not impoſe upon themſelves and others by the uſe of words, the meaning of which they do not underſtand. What is nature? what is reaſon? Theſe terms ought to be defined, for there is cauſe to ſuſpect, that men who introduce, or who adopt ſuch impiety of expreſſion, are rather ignorant of what atheiſm is, than that they are, what they affect to be thought, atheiſts on conviction. By nature then we may underſtand, the order and conſtitution of things compoſing the univerſe—and by reaſon, that faculty of the human mind by which we are able to diſcover truth.—And can it be thought, that this ſyſtem of things, conſiſting of an infinity of parts fitted to anſwer ends which human wiſdom can never comprehend in their full extent, but which, as far as it can comprehend them, appear to be beneficial to man and all other percipient beings—can it be thought, that this ſyſtem had not an intelligent, benevolent, powerful Author?

When a man makes a watch, builds a ſhip, erects a ſilk-mill, conſtructs a teleſcope, we do not ſcruple to ſay, that the man has a deſign in what he does. And can we ſay, that this ſolar ſyſtem, a thouſand times more regular in all it's motions than watches, ſhips, or ſilk-mills—that the infinity of other ſyſtems diſperſed through the immenſity of ſpace, inconceivably

conceivably ſurpaſſing in magnitude and complication of motion, this, of which our earth is but a minute part—or even that the eye which now reads what is here written, a thouſand times better fitted for it's function than any teleſcope—can we ſay, that there was no deſign in the formation of theſe things?

Tell us not, that it is allowed there muſt be intelligence in an artificer who makes a watch or a teleſcope, but that, as to the Artificer of the univerſe, we cannot comprehend his nature. What then, ſhall we on that account deny his exiſtence? With better reaſon might a grub, buried in the bowels of the earth, deny the exiſtence of a man, whoſe nature it cannot comprehend; for a grub is indefinitely nearer to man in all intellectual endowments (if the expreſſion can be permitted), than man is to his Maker.—With better reaſon may we deny the exiſtence of an intellectual faculty in the man who makes a machine; we know not the nature of the man; we ſee not the mind which contrives the figure, ſize, and adaptation of the ſeveral parts; we ſimply ſee the hand which forms and puts them together.

Shall a ſhipwrecked mathematician, on obſerving a geometrical figure accurately deſcribed on the ſand of the ſea-ſhore, encourage his followers with ſaying, "Let us hope for the beſt, for I ſee the traces of men;"—and ſhall not man, in contemplating the ſtructure of the univerſe, or of any part of it, ſay

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to the whole human race—Brethren! be of good comfort, we are not begotten of chance, we are not born of atoms, our progenitors have not come into exiſtence by crawling out of the mud of the Nile, behold the footſteps of a Being powerful, wiſe, and good—not nature, but the God of nature, the Father of the univerſe!

I will not entangle the underſtanding of my audience, or bewilder mine own, in the labyrinths of metaphyſical reſearches; but I muſt ſay to theſe—the great philoſophers of the age—you ought to know, that matter cannot have been from eternity—and that if, with *Plato*, you contend for the eternity of matter, you ought to know, that motion cannot have been from eternity—and that if, with *Ariſtotle*, you contend for the eternity of motion, you ought to know, that with him alſo you muſt contend for the eternity of a firſt mover—you muſt introduce, what you labour to exclude, a God, cauſing, regulating, and preſerving, by eſtabliſhed laws, the motion of every particle of matter in the univerſe.

You affirm that nature is your God, and you inform us that the energy of nature is the cauſe of every thing—that nature has power to produce a man—In all this you ſeem to ſubſtitute the term nature for what we underſtand by the term God. But when you tell us that nature acts (if ſuch exertion can be called action) neceſſarily and without

out intelligence, we readily acknowledge that your God is eſſentially different from our God. "All novelty is but oblivion;" this famous *ſyſtem of nature*, which has excited ſo much unmerited attention, and done ſuch incredible miſchief throughout Europe, is in little or in nothing different from the ſyſtem of certain atheiſtic philoſophers mentioned by *Cicero*, who maintained, that "nature was a certain energy, deſtitute of intelligence, exciting in bodies neceſſary motions."—The anſwer is obvious and ſhort—an energy deſtitute of freedom and of intelligence cannot produce a man poſſeſſing both; as well may it be ſaid, that an effect may be produced without a cauſe.

The proof of the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, which is derived from the conſtitution of the viſible world, is of a popular caſt; but you muſt not therefore ſuppoſe it to be calculated to convince only perſons who cannot reaſon philoſophically. What think you of *Newton?* He certainly could reaſon philoſophically. He certainly, of all the ſons of men, beſt underſtood the ſtructure of the univerſe; and he eſteemed that ſtructure to be ſo irrefragable a proof of the exiſtence and providence of an almighty, wiſe, and good Architect of nature, that he never pronounced the word—God—without a pauſe.*—What think you of *Cotes*—ſecond in ſublimity of philoſophic genius to none but *Newton?*—"That man," ſays he, "muſt be

* Boyle

be blind, who, from the moſt wiſe and excellent diſpoſal of things, cannot immediately perceive the infinite wiſdom and goodneſs of their almighty Creator; and he muſt be mad, who refuſes to acknowledge them."

The argument, which I have been hitherto inſiſting upon, may be called a natural argument for the Being of God, as it is taken from the contemplation of nature; I proceed to another of great weight, which may be called an hiſtorical argument, as it is grounded on teſtimony concerning paſt tranſactions.

That this world has not been from eternity, but that it was either created from nothing, or fitted up by the Supreme Being for the habitation of man, a few thouſand years ago—that it was afterwards deſtroyed by an univerſal deluge, brought upon it by the ſame Being—that it has been repeopled by the deſcendants of three men, who eſcaped the general deſtruction—theſe things are either ancient fact, or ancient fables—if they are facts, both atheiſm and infidelity muſt be given up—and that they are facts and not fables, might, if time would permit, be ſatisfactorily proved from a detailed examination of the hiſtory of every nation in the world.

The credible annals of all nations, not excepting Egypt or Chaldea, China or India, fall ſhort of the deluge.—The annals of all nations, ancient and modern, barbarous

and civilized, ſpeak of a deluge as of a dreadful cataſtrophe which had deſtroyed human kind, through the interpoſition of a ſuperior Being offended by the vices of the world.—The annals of all nations bear witneſs to the exiſtence of a God who had created all things, for even in the time of *Ariſtotle* there was, as he obſerves, "an ancient tradition (he does not ſay a deduction of reaſon, but a report or tradition) which all men had derived from their anceſtors, that all things were from God, and that by God all things did conſiſt."—(εκ τυ Θευ τα παντα, και δια Θευ ημιν συνεςηκεν. Ariſt. de Mund. Cr.)—Remarkable words theſe! and analogous to thoſe of *St. Paul*, ſpeaking of Chriſt, and, as is generally thought, of the creation of the material world, "All things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things conſiſt."—(τα παντα δι αυτυ και εις αυτον εκτιςαι, και αυτος εςι προ παντων, και τα παντα εν αυτω συνεςηκε. Col. 1. 17.)

He who has employed moſt time in examining the hiſtory of remote ages, will be moſt convinced of the truth of the following propoſitions—that profane authors derived their notions of a Supreme Being from patriarchal tradition—that they corrupted this tradition—that the Bible is the only book in the world in which this tradition is preſerved in it's original purity—that this invaluable book throws light upon the origin and ancient hiſtory of every nation in the world—and that the hiſtory of

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the Jews, contained in the bible, and connected with their hiſtory to the preſent time, is the ſtrongeſt proof which can be brought, not only againſt atheiſm, but againſt that ſpecies of deiſm which contends, that God never viſibly interpoſed in the government of the Jewiſh nation.

When it is ſaid that the annals of all nations fall ſhort of the deluge, it muſt be underſtood, that the nation of the Jews is excepted. I look upon that people with aſtoniſhment and reverence; they are living proofs of facts moſt ancient and moſt intereſting to mankind. Where do we meet with an Aſſyrian, Perſian, Grecian, Roman, corroborating, by his teſtimony, any one of the events mentioned in the hiſtory of their reſpective empires? But we meet with millions of Jews in every quarter, and in every country of the world, who acknowledge not only the exiſtence of a God, as other nations do—but that he is the very God who enabled Moſes to work miracles in Egypt; who delivered to him that law which they now obſerve; who called Abraham, the father of their nation, from the midſt of his idolatrous kinſmen; who preſerved Noah and his family in the ark; who formed Adam out of the duſt of the earth; who created all things by the word of his power.

Wherever we have a Jew on the ſurface of the earth, there we have a man, whoſe teſtimony and whoſe conduct connect the

preſent time with the beginning of all time. He now believes, and he declares that all his progenitors have conſtantly believed, the hiſtory contained in the book of Moſes to be a true hiſtory—he now obeys the laws which God gave to Moſes above three thouſand years ago—now practiſes the circumciſion which God enjoined to Abraham—now obſerves the paſſover in commemoration of the mercy vouchſafed to his nation when God deſtroyed the firſt-born throughout the land of Egypt—now keeps holy the ſeventh day, on which God reſted from the works of the creation. When nations inſtitute rites to preſerve the memory of great events, the uniform obſervance of the rite authorizes us to admit the certainty of the fact. The Jews have for thouſands of years (and the patriarchs, before the Jews, probably the ſame) obſerved a very ſignificant rite in commemoration of the creation; and another in commemoration of their preſervation from one of the plagues of Egypt: why ſhould we heſitate to admit the certainty of theſe events? Adam lived with Methuſelah 240 years, Methuſelah lived with Shem the ſon of Noah 98 years, and Shem lived with Abraham 150 years: what apprehenſion can we reaſonably entertain that the account of the creation could either have been forged or miſrepreſented, when it had paſſed through ſo few hands before it had reached the founder of the Jewiſh nation?

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But I have already gone beyond the limit I had preſcribed to myſelf in this argument, I cannot purſue it farther; ſceptical men, however, will do well to conſider the nature and weight of hiſtoric evidence, not only for the exiſtence of God, but for his having made a revelation of himſelf to the Jewiſh nation. Let them examine the matter freely and fully, and I cannot but believe that they will come to the following concluſions—that the creation is a fact—that the deluge is a fact—that the re-peopling the world by the deſcendants of Noah is a fact—that the Jewiſh theocracy is a fact—and that theſe facts may be eſtabliſhed, as all paſt tranſactions of great antiquity muſt be, by the authority of hiſtory, and eſpecially by the hiſtory of the Jews, whom God appears to have conſtituted witneſſes of his exiſtence and providence to all nations in all ages. Of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Tyrians, and of other nations, God hath made, or will make, a *full end; but the ſeed of Iſrael ſhall not ceaſe from being a nation before him for ever.*

If the refutation of atheiſm and deiſm be ſo eaſy and certain as I have here ſtated it to be, whence comes it that there are now ſo many, or that there ever were any either atheiſts, or unbelievers in the truth of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian diſpenſations? I put theſe diſpenſations together, becauſe thoſe amongſt us (I ſpeak not of the Jews), who deny or admit the divine miſſion of Moſes,

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will deny alſo or admit the divine miſſion of Jeſus Chriſt.

There are many cauſes of infidelity, ſuch as profligacy of manners, which induces men to hope that religion may not be true —want of ſerious attention to the proofs on which it is eſtabliſhed — haſty concluſions that, becauſe ſome religions have been proved to be impoſtures, all are ſo—ſuperſtitious ceremonies and revolting doctrines, which are, in many parts of chriſtendom, pertinaciouſly maintained as parts of chriſtianity—intolerance, ſecularity, hypocriſy, conſpicuous in the lives of chriſtians---theſe and other cauſes of infidelity might be enlarged upon at great length, but I will only beg your attention to one other, leſs obvious, and leſs general, but more dangerous than any of thoſe which I have mentioned---more dangerous, inaſmuch as it operates chiefly on the minds of men of the moſt cultivated and enlarged underſtandings, I mean---miſtaken piety.

That the Creator and Governor of the univerſe, who endureth through eternity, and filleth immenſity; that this Almighty Being, who hath diſtributed innumerable ſyſtems of material worlds through the profundity of ſpace, and hath, probably, repleniſhed them all with percipient beings, capable of enjoying the happineſs which his goodneſs hath wiſely allotted to their reſpective ſtations; that this ſelf-exiſtent, uncauſed cauſe of all Being, whom no language can deſcribe, no thought

can

can comprehend, ſhould at ſundry times and in divers inſtances have ſuſpended the laws of nature which he had eſtabliſhed, viſited in an extraordinary manner this little globe, this atom of the univerſe, and by ſigns and wonders have made a revelation of his will to ſuch a worm as man---this appears to many men, of good lives and ſtrong minds, ſo ſtrange a fact, that they are perſuaded no human teſtimony can eſtabliſh it's credibility. They venerate the majeſty of the Supreme Being, they are perſuaded that all things were made by him, and that all things were ſuſtained by him; but they think that it derogates from the infinity of his wiſdom and of his power, to ſuppoſe things to have been at firſt ſo ill made, as to require his ſubſequent interpoſition to regulate or amend them.

Bleſſed God! what is this but making our ways thy ways, but meaſuring thy infinity by the ſtandard of our philoſophy? We know the difficulty of regulating the minute concerns of a kingdom, a province, or a family, by ſpecial interpoſitions of any one man's wiſdom or authority; and thence we ſimply infer, that the interpoſitions of the Almighty in governing every part of the univerſe is a circumſtance not to be expected. We know that a machine of our conſtruction approaches to perfection in proportion as it wants not external aid to direct or preſerve it's motion, and thence we ſimply infer that the works of God, which cannot but be perfect in their kind,

kind, want not his interpoſition. Abſolute perfection belongs to God alone; in all the things which he hath made there is a gradation of excellence, each thing is as perfect as it's nature will admit:—now why may it not be the nature of man to admit indefinite improvement from divine inſtitution? It will be granted that man would be a more perfect Being than he is, if, on all occaſions, his paſſions were kept in ſubjection to his reaſon, if he was guilty of no impiety towards his Maker, of no uncharitableneſs towards his neighbour, of no violence towards himſelf in an intemperate indulgence of his appetites: —where then is the abſurdity of ſuppoſing, that God may have thought fit to ſtrengthen the reaſon and to weaken the paſſions of mankind by bringing *immortality to light*, by giving an actual example of a reſurrection from the dead, by promulgating the certainty of rewards and puniſhments in another ſtate?

Surely it is a miſtaken piety, which, from a ſublime idea of the Divine Eſſence, would exclude the Supreme Being from interfering in the works which he hath made, which would hinder him from ſtill working, 'till he hath brought all things to that perfection for which his goodneſs intended them. What that perfection is we know not; it muſt ever fall infinitely ſhort of the perfection of God himſelf, but it is not poſſible for us to ſay to what degree it may be advanced, or to point

out

out the beſt means fitted to advance it to the degree predetermined in the councils of the Almighty. We cannot look into the depths of God's wiſdom, nor comprehend the ends he has in view, or the ways by which he effects them.

It is the not properly conſidering the extent of our capacity, the not clearly diſtinguiſhing the things to which our ideas are ſuited, from thoſe to which they are inadequate, that has made many men fall into an irkſome ſcepticiſm, ſome into actual infidelity, and a few into the madneſs of atheiſm.

For what purpoſe was I born?---in what courſe of actions does the felicity of my nature conſiſt?---am I author of theſe reputed actions, or am I a machine inceſſantly and irreſiſtibly impelled to action, by external motives over which I have no controul?---will my exiſtence be terminated by death, or continued beyond it?---will the quality of my future exiſtence (if there ſhould happen to be one) depend on my moral conduct here? Theſe and other queſtions of ſimilar import every man of reflection muſt, at one time or other, put to himſelf; and when he does put them, he will perceive that his reaſon is unequal to the clear ſolution of any of them. That Jeſus Chriſt was born in Judea near 1800 years ago---that he wrought miracles in that country---that he was crucified at Jeruſalem---that he aroſe from the dead---that he aſcended into heaven---that he enabled his diſciples

diſciples to work miracles, and commanded them to teach the world the doctrines which he had taught them---theſe are ſome of the main facts on which the truth of the chriſtian religion is founded. Now it appears to me to be a much eaſier matter to prove the truth of theſe facts, than to give, from reaſon, a ſatisfactory anſwer to any of the difficulties which I have mentioned.

In the ardour of youth, in the tumult of ſenſual paſſion, in the profligacy of diſſipation, in the buſtle of buſineſs, in the ſordidneſs of avarice, in the loftineſs of ambition, thoughts of ſuch a ſerious caſt may either not occur, or be not regarded. But they will obtrude themſelves on a bed of ſickneſs at any period of life; they will ſurround the pillow of the unfortunate; they will penetrate the receſſes of retirement, whether occaſioned by a ſatiety of enjoyment, the chagrin of diſappointment, or by any of the ſad viciſſitudes incident to every human ſtation: and if they ſhould arreſt our notice on no other occaſion, they will certainly ſteal upon us with the increaſe of our age, and generate, in thoſe who reject chriſtianity, no ſmall perturbation, when the feebleneſs of declining life moſt requires tranquillity and conſolation.

Be it our buſineſs then, as it is our duty and our intereſt, to confirm ourſelves in the belief of that goſpel by which all difficulties of this nature are done away. If that goſpel be

be true, (as it certainly is,) we know for what purpoſe we are born—that we may live for ever. We know that we are not machines, but accountable for our actions, which machines cannot be. We know in what the felicity of our nature doth conſiſt—in living *ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.* We know that death is not *eternal ſleep*, but the commencement of everlaſting life.

I conclude with recommending one obſervation to the ſerious attention of all unbelievers, who are ſincerely deſirous of becoming chriſtians—that they would well conſider the quality of the proof which the ſubject admits. The truth of the chriſtian religion is, as to us, founded on the reality of paſt tranſactions. Now paſt tranſactions are neither the objects of ſenſe, nor of intuition, nor of demonſtration; we cannot, correctly ſpeaking, be ſaid to know that they ever exiſted; but the probability, which is grounded on teſtimony, approaches, in many caſes, ſo near to certainty, that our belief of paſt tranſactions is little different from knowledge itſelf. He who requires more than probability before he will embrace chriſtianity, requires what the nature of the ſubject does not admit, and ſubverts the foundation of all hiſtory, ſacred and profane. That Jeſus wrought miracles in Judea, and aroſe from the dead at Jeruſalem, are facts as capable of being aſcertained, and as worthy of being credited,

as

as that Cæſar lived at Rome, and was murdered in the capitol.

May the merciful Father of the whole human race, who, for reaſons beſt known to his unſearchable wiſdom, hath ſuffered many millions to die, and ſuffers many millions alſo now to live, in utter ignorance of that revelation of his will, which he hath given to the chriſtian world, accept our humble thankſgivings for ſuch an ineſtimable benefit! May he *eſtabliſh*, *ſtrengthen*, *ſettle* the inhabitants of theſe kingdoms in the faith of Chriſt; and be graciouſly pleaſed to remove from all others the *ignorance that is in them*, leſt, *in being aliens from the commonwealth of Iſrael, ſtrangers from the covenants of promiſe, having no hope and without God in the world, they become to every good work reprobate*; leſt, *in being ſpoiled through philoſophy and vain deceit*, they fall into perdition, temporal and eternal.

SERMON

SERMON II.

2 PET. i. 16.

We have not followed cunningly deviſed fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, but were eye-witneſſes of his majeſty.

WHETHER the chriſtian religion be a revelation of the will of God, or a cunningly deviſed fable, is a queſtion which, one might think, every ſerious man would examine with impartial attention. He would take, it might be expected, the New Teſtament into his hand, and obſerving that it conſiſted of various parts, and had been written by different authors, he would inquire what evidence there was for it's being a *genuine* book. If he found, as I am perſuaded he would find, that there were as ſolid reaſons for believing that the goſpel of St. Luke, and the Acts of the Apoſtles, were written by him, and the other parts of the New Teſtament by the perſons to whom they are aſcribed, as that the hiſtory of the Peloponneſian war was written by Thucidydes, or the lives of the Cæſars by Suetonius; he would then inquire, whether the book was not only a genuine, but an *authentic* one; that is, whether it contained a narration of events which had really taken place in Judea, near eighteen hundred years ago

ago, or whether there was any reaſonable cauſe to ſuſpect that the authors of the New Teſtament had not honeſtly related what had really happened. With reſpect to the honeſty of the writers, he would judge of that from their characters; and with reſpect to the reality of the facts mentioned by them, he would conſider, that moſt of the writers of the New Teſtament did not relate what they had heard, but what they had ſeen; ſo that, if they were honeſt men, there could remain no doubt of the truth of what they had delivered. He would admit, for the ſake of argument, that as ſimple hiſtorians, they might, notwithſtanding their honeſty, have fallen into trivial miſtakes in their narration of what they had ſeen; and that, notwithſtanding their honeſty, they might have been full of credulity, and liable to impoſition; but he would think it quite impoſſible, that facts of ſuch public notoriety and importance as the life, death, and reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt, could have been the ſubjects, either of human error, or credulity, in thoſe who profeſſed to have been eye-witneſſes of what they related. He would therefore certainly conclude, that the chriſtian religion was true, if the writers of the New Teſtament were honeſt men.

If the writers of the New Teſtament were not honeſt men, they were impoſtors: now that they were not impoſtors, may appear from conſidering—that they had neither motive to commence, nor ability to carry on an impoſture—and from examining the account

they

they give of themſelves and of their aſſociates, immediately before, and ſoon after the reſurrection of Jeſus.

Impoſtors are moved to the attempt of deceiving mankind by proſpects of wealth, fame, power, pleaſure; by ſome real or imaginary advantages to be derived to themſelves, or, through them, to thoſe whom they love and regard as themſelves. Now no expectation of this kind can, with the leaſt ſhadow of probability, be aſcribed to all, or to any of the writers of the New Teſtament. There is no need of entering into the proof of this; every one knows that Jews and Romans, Greeks and Barbarians; that the powers of the world, wherever they went, were againſt the apoſtles; they durſt not any where lift up ſo much as an arm in their own defence. Inſtead of temporal advantages of any kind, they had to expect, and they did in fact experience, hunger, and cold, and nakedneſs, and ſcorn, and contempt, and hatred, all the miſeries incident to a ſtate of poverty, all the calamities attendant on a ſtate of religious perſecution:---theſe are not the motives which induce men to become impoſtors. Read the hiſtory of the impoſtor *Mahomet*, or that of *Alexander* as deſcribed by Lucian, or that of *Apollonius of Tyana*; and contraſt them with that of Chriſt, or of any of his apoſtles, and you will at once perceive the difference between the manner in which impoſture and truth are introduced and

eſtabliſhed

eſtabliſhed in the world. Compare the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament, with reſpect to their publicity, their beneficial tendency, and their influence on the thouſands who ſaw them, with the tricks of ancient or modern pretenders to magic; and you will at once perceive the difference between cunningly deviſed deluſions operating on fanatical minds, and the ſimplicity of goſpel wonders extorting conviction from the moſt incredulous. The apoſtles were as deſtitute of ability to deceive, as of inducement to impoſe a fable on the world. It requires great power, or great talents, to be a ſucceſsful impoſtor; and the difficulty is encreaſed, when the plot cannot be carried on without the concurrence of many aſſiſtants; and eſpecially when it is to be carried on, in oppoſition to men able and willing to detect the cheat. What ſhould we think of twelve fiſhermen, who ſhould now undertake to proclaim, in the hearing of the learned and unlearned, that a few years ago a certain man wrought many miracles, not only in a diſtant county, but in the ſtreets and churches of the metropolis of the kingdom; not only before them, the relaters of the fact, but in the preſence of thouſands of others; and that this man was publicly tried by order of the government, and put to death in London; and that he roſe from the dead; and that after his reſurrection he was ſeen not only by themſelves, but by hundreds of others, and by ſome who were ſtill alive?—What ſhould

we

we think of ſuch aſſertions, of ſuch audacious appeals to living witneſſes, when in truth this man had not riſen from the dead, nor wrought any miracle whatever?—What ſhould we think of twelve fiſhermen, who, without underſtanding any language but their own, ſhould go to Paris, Rome, Madrid, Conſtantinople, and endeavour to propagate the ſame thing? Is it credible that any men could be found ſo mad as to make the attempt, or that, if they did make it, they ſhould have the good fortune to ſucceed in their impoſition?

That a great part of the world is converted to chriſtianity, is a fact;—that the foundation of this converſion was laid by the apoſtles, is another fact;—that the apoſtles were men of mean connections, ſlender talents, ſlow apprehenſions; of powers, faculties, and diſpoſitions, utterly inadequate to the introducing and ſupporting an impoſture, are other facts, of which, when properly conſidered, we cannot, it is apprehended, ſuffer ourſelves to doubt. If we admit the account, contained in the New Teſtament, concerning the means by which the chriſtian religion was eſtabliſhed, every thing is credible; if we reject it, every thing is incredible; no ſatisfactory reaſon can be aſſigned for the zeal, or for the ſucceſs of the apoſtles in propagating an untruth; their zeal will want a motive, and their ſucceſs will want a cauſe adequate to the effect.

Conſider farther, that there is no book now in the world, nor, as far as we know, ever

was one, contradicting any of the facts recorded in the New Teſtament; but that there are ſeveral books, *written by men who were not chriſtians*, which confirm many of them: *Tacitus*, in particular, confirms a fact of principal importance; for he tells us, that Jeſus Chriſt was put to death by Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea.—There is not therefore any external teſtimony, that the writers of the New Teſtament have written a fable; if we refuſe to believe their narration, our refuſal, if it has any foundation beſide that of prejudice and ignorance of the ſubject, muſt be built on ſomething contained in the New Teſtament itſelf; now every thing related in the New Teſtament, and eſpecially what is related concerning the conduct of the apoſtles, before and after the reſurrection of Jeſus, carries with it the ſtrongeſt proof of the honeſty of the writers of it; and if they were honeſt men, the chriſtian religion is true.

What would have been the conduct of diſhoneſt men, who had combined to cheat the world into a belief of what had never happened, into the adoption of a new religion of which they themſelves were to be the principal promoters? Would they have ever told to the world circumſtances ſo diſgraceful to their characters, as the evangeliſts have done? Impoſtors carefully conceal their ambition, their avarice, their cowardice, their inſincerity, their vices and imperfections of every

every kind, and make an oſtentatious diſplay of virtues and excellencies which they do not really poſſeſs. But the evangeliſts, having no deſign to deceive, relate, without diſguiſe, facts tending to lower their characters in the general eſtimation of mankind. They tell us that there was a ſtrife among the apoſtles, which of them ſhould be the greateſt; and that, as intereſted and ambitious men are wont to do, they had all been very forward in profeſſing to Jeſus their ſtrong attachment to him---"that if they ſhould die with him, they would not deny him:"---they then proceed to inform us, diſgraceful as the account is, that in a very few hours after they had made theſe ſolemn profeſſions, when the moment of peril came, and their ſelfiſh views were blaſted,---"they all forſook him and fled."---This humiliating narrative is a proof of their veracity as hiſtorians, and their conduct on the occaſion is highly credible.

Notwithſtanding the long intimacy which the apoſtles of Jeſus had enjoyed with him; nothwithſtanding the diſtinction with which they had been honoured by him; notwithſtanding the knowledge they had of the probity of his manners, of the purity of his doctrines, and of the greatneſs of his power in working miracles; notwithſtanding the promiſe he had made them of his going to prepare a place for them in his Father's kingdom, of his riſing from the dead, of his returning to them again, and of his not leaving

them comfortleſs; notwithſtanding theſe and many other circumſtances ſufficient, one might at firſt view have imagined, to have generated courage, and ſecured attachment in all his followers, yet they all abandoned him in his diſtreſs—"forſook him and fled—the ſhepherd was ſmitten, and the ſheep were ſcattered."

This conduct was extremely natural. The diſciples of Jeſus, and his apoſtles eſpecially, expected that their maſter would become a great temporal prince, and that they were to participate in the power, wealth, and honour, which he would at length attain. But when they ſaw him ſeized by his enemies, and dragged as a malefactor before the great council of the nation, they not only gave up their hopes of advancement, but were alarmed for their own perſonal ſafety; they yielded to fears inſeparable from humanity; and which are ſeldom overcome, except by perſons impreſſed with high notions of honourable reputation. This conduct of the apoſtles is ſo intirely conformable to what we every day obſerve, that it forces, at it were, our aſſent to the truth of the narration. When the founder of a ſect in religion, or the leader of a faction in the ſtate, happens to fall into diſgrace, his adherents preſently begin to be ſhy of his acquaintance; and if he happens not merely to fall into diſgrace, but to be arreſted as a peſtilent diſturber of the public peace, then do they begin to avoid him; and if they cannot eſcape the ſuſpicion of being known to him,

him, they begin, eſpecially if they be men of low education, to lie and to ſwear, as Peter did, that they know not the man, never had communication or connection with him.

Compare this ſelfiſhneſs and cowardice of the apoſtles, with the courage and diſintereſtedneſs which ſoon after adorned their character, and try if you can diſcover any ſufficient reaſon for ſo remarkable a change of conduct and principle.

Did Pilate, repenting of his wickedneſs, extend the protection of the civil power to the followers of Jeſus, whom, contrary to all the rules of civil juſtice, he had condemned to death, though he confeſſed that he found no cauſe of death in him? No, we hear nothing of the repentance of Pilate.—Did the chief prieſts and elders of the Jewiſh people, repenting of the premeditated malice by which they had ſought the life of Jeſus, by which they had bribed Judas to betray innocent blood, by which they had intimidated Pilate to crucify a juſt perſon; did theſe men, ſtruck with remorſe, encourage the apoſtles to adhere to their crucified maſter? No, theſe men retained their malice after the object of it was removed, they perſecuted the apoſtles for preaching in the name of Jeſus.---Did the multitude, who a few days before his trial had uſhered Jeſus into Jeruſalem with triumphant acclamations of applauſe; who, at the time of his trial, as if drunk with fury, had cried out, "crucify him, crucify him, his blood be on us

and

and our children;" did this multitude (as is not unuſual for multitudes to do) once more change their mind, and undertake the defence of the followers of that man, whom in their phrenzy they had murdered? No, we read nothing of the multitude becoming ſupporters of the apoſtles, till the wonders and ſigns which were done by them, brought fear on every ſoul; the ſupport of the multitude was ſubſequent to the preaching of Peter and the apoſtles, it could not therefore have been the cauſe of their courage—Joſeph of Arimathea was a diſciple of Chriſt, and a rich man; Nicodemus was a diſciple of Chriſt, and a powerful man, for he was a ruler of the Jews; did theſe or any other men by their wealth or authority inſpire the apoſtles with fortitude to face their enemies, and the enemies of their crucified Lord? No, nothing of this kind, but the contrary of it appears in the hiſtory; for it appears that the diſciples on the day of the reſurrection, and for ſome days afterwards were ſo full of apprehenſion, that they aſſembled privately with the door of their apartment ſhut, for fear of the Jews. What was it then that cauſed the apoſtles to change their cowardice into courage, their deſertion into attachment, their aim at worldy advancement into a voluntary ſurrender of every worldly comfort, into a patient ſubmiſſion to every evil which could afflict human nature? What, but the conviction

that

that their Lord was riſen from the dead? This is a cauſe adequate to the effect; it is a miſuſe of time, and a perverſion of talents, to ſeek for any other. This conduct of the apoſtles before, and after the reſurrection of their Lord, is a ſtrong argument in ſupport of the truth of our holy religion.

Let us conſider more particularly the account which is given of their conduct. After the crucifixion of Jeſus, the apoſtles were obliged to ſtay at Jeruſalem at leaſt a week, that they might keep the paſſover according to the law; during this period Jeſus appeared twice to them when they were aſſembled together. After the feaſt was ended, they returned to their native country, Galilee; and Jeſus appeared to them, at the place he had before appointed: it is probable that he ſhowed himſelf frequently to them in that country, for he was ſeen of them forty days, ſpeaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. On the approach of the feaſt of pentecoſt, or the feaſt of weeks, which, according to the law, was to be kept at Jeruſalem by all the Jews, fifty days after the celebration of the paſſover, the apoſtles went from Galilee to Jeruſalem; and there they were again met by their maſter; who commanded them to ſtay at Jeruſalem, till they were endued with power from on high, till they were baptized by the Holy Ghoſt, which he aſſured them they

they would be in a little time. He gave them alſo their commiſſion—" Ye ſhall receive power, after that the Holy Ghoſt is come upon you, and ye ſhall be witneſſes unto me, both in Jeruſalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermoſt parts of the earth.—And when he had ſpoken theſe things, while they beheld he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their ſight."—A few days after this, they were all filled with the Holy Ghoſt, and enabled to ſpeak a variety of languages which they had never learned, and to work miracles ſurpaſſing all human power.

Now ſuppoſing the ſcripture account of the reſurrection of Jeſus; of his frequently appearing to his diſciples after his reſurrection; of his inſtructing them in the nature of his kingdom; of his giving them a commiſſion to bear witneſs concerning him to all the world; of his aſcending into heaven while they looked on him; of his ſending the Holy Ghoſt, by which they were enabled to ſpeak with tongues, and to work miracles; ſuppoſing theſe things to have really happened, what conduct would you have expected from the apoſtles? Preciſely that which they adopted. They no longer denied their maſter, no longer ſhut themſelves up in ſecret, no longer feared the Jewiſh rulers, no longer diſputed amongſt themſelves which of them ſhould have the firſt place in the kingdom of Chriſt; but relinquiſhing

quiſhing all earthly comfort, ſetting at defiance all oppoſition, braving all perſecution, they went through the world executing the commiſſion they had received, every where maintaining—that Jeſus of Nazareth, whilſt he was alive, was a man proved to be from God, by miracles which God did by him; that God raiſed him from the dead; that after his reſurrection they frequently converſed with him; that they ſaw him aſcend into heaven; and that they received from him the power of ſpeaking with tongues, and of working miracles.

Had Jeſus Chriſt never riſen from the dead, chriſtianity would, probably, never have been extended beyond the limits of Judea. His diſciples might have acquired a peculiar denomination, and would certainly have eſteemed him a great prophet; but not *the* prophet, not the Meſſiah, whom they expected to come into the world. In the interval between his death and his reſurrection, the minds of his apoſtles were perplexed with doubts concerning his being the perſon who was to reſtore Iſrael. They were ſo backward in crediting the reports which were brought to them of his reſurrection, that, it is evident, they either did not believe, or, in the tumult of their grief, did not advert to what he had told them of his riſing again the third day: and it is very probable that, if he had not riſen from the dead, his diſciples would have contented themſelves with reverencing, in ſecret

ſecret, the memory of their maſter; they could not have doubted concerning the reality of the miracles which they had ſeen him perform; but they would neither have had the courage to attempt the converſion of the world to a dead man, nor the means to effect it.

Hiſtory affords many inſtances of men, who have ſuſtained with fortitude the greateſt perſecutions in ſupport of opinions perfectly erroneous, as well as in ſupport of thoſe which are founded in truth. A Jew will ſooner be tortured by the inquiſition, and burned at the ſtake, than he will acknowledge Jeſus to be the Meſſiah. A chriſtian will ſuffer martyrdom, ſooner than he will deny that Jeſus is the Meſſiah. A Mahometan will ſooner be put to death, than he will own Mahomet to have been an impoſtor; and both Jews and Chriſtians will ſuffer any perſecution ſooner than they will acknowledge him to have been a prophet ſent from God. It is not only in theſe great points that human fortitude triumphs over pain and death; but there is no chriſtian ſect which cannot boaſt of numbers who would ſeal, I do not ſay, the truth, but their opinion of the truth, with their blood. Servetus was burned to death, becauſe he would not profeſs, that he believed Chriſt to be the eternal Son of God, though, in the midſt of the flames, he profeſſed that Chriſt was the Son of the eternal God;—and Calvin would have

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ſuffered the death which he made Servetus ſuffer, ſooner than he would have acknowledged, that Chriſt was not the eternal Son of the eternal God.---We learn from the hiſtory of fanaticiſm and ſuperſtition, that men have died martyrs to opinions unintelligible, abſurd, immoral, impious. All this may be allowed, but the inference, which is generally drawn by ſceptical men from ſuch obſervations, cannot be allowed; the inference is this---that the fortitude of the apoſtles, in ſuſtaining perſecution, is no proof of the truth of the Chriſtian religion, inaſmuch as an equal degree of fortitude has often been diſplayed by other men in ſupport of opinions evidently not true.---This inference cannot be allowed for this reaſon---that an eſſential difference is to be made between him who dies in atteſtation of a matter of fact, and him who dies in atteſtation of an opinion. The apoſtles died in atteſtation of their having ſeen Jeſus work miracles, whilſt he was alive; and of their having converſed with him after his reſurrection from the dead. Theſe are not abſtruſe opinions, but things which either did, or did not happen; any man is competent to ſay, whether he ſaw them happen or not; and the apoſtles died in maintaining that they did ſee them happen: they "were eye-witneſſes of his majeſty." The chriſtian martyrs who had never ſeen Jeſus, nor been eye-witneſſes of any miracles wrought by him,

him, or by others in his name, but who died, rather than they would abandon the belief which they had adopted, contributed, by their conſtancy, to the propagation of the chriſtian religion; but they did not eſtabliſh it's truth in the ſame way that the apoſtles did.

The chriſtians of the preſent age are ſtrong in opinion, that Jeſus was raiſed from the dead—the Jews and unbelievers of the preſent age are ſtrong in opinion, that Jeſus was not raiſed from the dead. Chriſtians and Jews, of all preceding ages, till we come to the very time when this great event—the reſurrection of Jeſus—either did or did not happen, have been uniform in their reſpective opinions, and both are now ready to ſhed their blood in ſupport of them; there is no hypocriſy in the profeſſion of either; what reaſon then has an impartial inquirer after truth to credit the chriſtian rather than the Jew?—He has this reaſon; the groundwork of the belief of the chriſtian is a matter of fact atteſted by eye-witneſſes; but the groundwork of the belief of the Jew is an aſſertion deſtitute of proof. The Jews, who lived at the time when Jeſus either did or did not riſe from the dead, found the ſepulchre, in which his body had been laid, empty. The ſepulchre might have become empty two ways, either by the body having been raiſed from the dead, or by it's having been taken away. The Jews aſſerted that it was

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taken away by his diſciples, but they gave no proof of their aſſertion; they neither pretended to have ſeen it taken away, nor to have ſeen it after it had been taken away. The apoſtles alſo found the ſepulchre empty, but they did not, from that circumſtance, aſſert, that Jeſus was riſen from the dead; no, they aſſerted that they had ſeen him, handled him, eaten with him, converſed with him, not only once, but often, and in different places, after his reſurrection from the dead. Now, no one, who underſtands the nature of evidence, can heſitate in pronouncing, that the belief of the chriſtians of the preſent age, when traced back to it's origin, is founded on a rock, on the teſtimony of eye-witneſſes to a matter of fact; whilſt that of the Jews is founded on an aſſertion of their anceſtors not only deſtitute of proof, but utterly incredible, as might eaſily be ſhewn from an examination of the circumſtances attending the crucifixion and interment of Jeſus.

Had the chief prieſts reported, that, in conſequence of the precautions they had taken, the body of Jeſus was on the third day after the crucifixion found in the ſepulchre; and had the apoſtles reported, that on the third day the body was not found in the ſepulchre, and ſaid no more upon the ſubject; the chriſtians and Jews, of ſucceeding ages, might, with ſome appearance of reaſon, have diſputed concerning the degree of credit due to the teſtimony of their reſpective progenitors

progenitors. Yet, even on this ſuppoſition, the chriſtian would have had a better foundation for his belief, than the Jew could lay claim to; for the predeceſſors of the chriſtian ſacrificed their lives in ſupport of their teſtimony, but the predeceſſors of the Jew gave no ſuch proof of their ſincerity and truth.

The ſum of what has been ſaid amounts to this—we have as great, if not greater reaſon to believe, that the hiſtory of the life, death, and reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt, as related in the New Teſtament, is a genuine and authentic hiſtory, as we have to believe in the genuineneſs and authenticity of any other ancient book—we have no evidence external or internal to induce us to conclude, that the apoſtles had either ability or motive to introduce and propagate an impoſture. The ſelfiſhneſs, ambition, and cowardice of the apoſtles, ſhewn during the life, and at the death of Jeſus, are perfectly natural and credible; and when contraſted with their ſubſequent diſintereſtedneſs, humility, and fortitude, afford an exceeding ſtrong proof, both of the general veracity of the evangeliſts as hiſtorians, and of the fact of the reſurrection of Jeſus, as a cauſe adequate to the production of ſo great, and otherwiſe unaccountable change in their character and conduct.

THE

THE CONCLUSION.

THE truth of Chriſtianity depends upon its leading facts, and upon them alone. Now of theſe we have evidence which ought to ſatisfy us, at leaſt until it appear that mankind have ever been deceived by the ſame. We have ſome uncontеſted and inconteſtible points, to which the hiſtory of the human ſpecies hath nothing ſimilar to offer. A Jewiſh peaſant changed the religion of the world, and that, without force, without power, without ſupport; without one natural ſource or circumſtance of attraction, influence, or ſucceſs. *Such a thing hath not happened in any other inſtance.* The companions of this perſon, after he himſelf had been put to death for his attempt, aſſerted his ſupernatural character, founded upon his ſupernatural operations; and, in teſtimony of the truth of their aſſertions, *i. e.* in conſequence of their own belief of that truth, and, in order to communicate the knowledge of it to others, voluntarily entered upon lives of toil and hardſhip, and, with a full experience of their danger, committed themſelves to the laſt extremities of perſecution. *This hath not a parallel.* More particularly, a very

very few days after this perſon had been publicly executed, and in the very city in which he was buried, theſe his companions declared with one voice that his body was reſtored to life; that they had ſeen him, handled him, eat with him, converſed with him; and, in purſuance of their perſuaſion of the truth of what they told, preached his religion, with this ſtrange fact as the foundation of it, in the face of thoſe who had killed him, who were armed with the power of the country, and neceſſarily and naturally diſpoſed to treat his followers as they had treated himſelf; and having done this upon the ſpot where the event took place, carried the intelligence of it abroad, in deſpite of difficulties and oppoſition, and where the nature of their errand gave them nothing to expect but deriſion, inſult, and outrage. *This is without example.* Theſe three facts, I think, are certain, and would have been nearly ſo, if the goſpels had never been written. The Chriſtian ſtory, as to theſe points, hath never varied. No other hath been ſet up againſt it. Every letter, every diſcourſe, every controverſy, amongſt the followers of the religion; every book written by them, from the age of its commencement to the preſent time, in every part of the world in which it hath been profeſſed, and with every ſect into which it hath been divided, (and we have letters and diſcourſes written by contemporaries, by witneſſes of the

the tranſaction, by perſons themſelves bearing a ſhare in it, and other writings following that age in regular ſucceſſion) *concur* in repreſenting theſe facts in this manner. A religion, which now poſſeſſes the greateſt part of the civiliſed world, unqueſtionably ſprang up at Jeruſalem at this time. Some account muſt be given of its origin, ſome cauſe aſſigned for its riſe. All the accounts of this origin, all the explications of this cauſe, whether taken from the writings of the early followers of the religion, in which, and in which perhaps alone, it could be expected that they ſhould be diſtinctly unfolded, or from occaſional notices in other writings of that or the adjoining age, either expreſsly alledge the facts above ſtated as the means by which the religion was ſet up, or advert to its commencement in a manner which agrees with the ſuppoſition of theſe facts being true, which renders them probable according to the then ſtate of the world, and which teſtifies their operation and effects.

Theſe propoſitions alone lay a foundation for our faith, for they prove the exiſtence of a tranſaction, which cannot even in its moſt *general* parts be accounted for upon any reaſonable ſuppoſition, except that of the truth of the miſſion. But the particulars, the *detail* of the miracles or miraculous pretences (for ſuch there neceſſarily muſt have been) upon which this unexampled tranſaction reſt-

ed, and *for* which theſe men acted and ſuffered as they did act and ſuffer, it is undoubtedly of great importance to us to know. We *have* this detail from the fountain head, from the perſons themſelves; in accounts written by eye-witneſſes of the ſcene, by contemporaries and companions of thoſe who were ſo; not in one book, but four, each containing enough for the verification of the religion, all agreeing in the fundamental parts of the hiſtory. We have the authenticity of theſe books eſtabliſhed by more and ſtronger proofs than belong to almoſt any other ancient book whatever, and by proofs which widely diſtinguiſh them from any others claiming a ſimilar authority to theirs. If there were any good reaſon for doubt concerning the names to which theſe books are aſcribed, (which there is not, for they were never aſcribed to any other, and we have evidence not long after their publication of their bearing the names which they now bear) their antiquity, of which there is no queſtion, their reputation and authority amongſt the early diſciples of the religion, of which there is as little, form a valid proof that they muſt, in the main at leaſt, have agreed with what the firſt teachers of the religion delivered.

When we open theſe ancient volumes, we diſcover in them marks of truth, whether we conſider each in itſelf, or collate them with one another. The writers certainly knew

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ſomething of what they were writing about, for they manifeſt an acquaintance with local circumſtances, with the hiſtory and uſages of the times, which could only belong to an inhabitant of that country, living in that age. In every narrative we perceive ſimplicity and undeſignedneſs; the air and the language of reality. When we compare the different narratives together, we find them ſo varying as to repel all ſuſpicion of confederacy; ſo agreeing under this variety, as to ſhow that the accounts had one real tranſaction for their common foundation: often attributing different actions and diſcourſes, to the perſon whoſe hiſtory, they profeſs to relate, yet actions and diſcourſes ſo ſimilar, as very much to beſpeak the ſame character; which is a coincidence, that, in ſuch writers as they were, could only be the conſequence of their writing from fact, and not from imagination.

Theſe four narratives are confined to the hiſtory of the founder of the religion, and end with *his* miniſtry. Since however it is certain that the affair went on, we cannot help being anxious to know *how* it proceeded. This intelligence hath come down to us in a work purporting to be written by a perſon, himſelf connected with the buſineſs during the firſt ſtages of its progreſs, taking up the ſtory where the former hiſtories had left it, carrying on the narrative, oftentimes with great particularity, and throughout with the

appearance of good ſenſe*, information and candour; ſtating all along the origin, and the only probable origin, of effects which unqueſtionably were produced, together with the natural conſequences of ſituations which unqueſtionably did exiſt; and *confirmed* in the ſubſtance at leaſt of the account, by the ſtrongeſt poſſible acceſſion of teſtimony which a hiſtory can receive, *original letters*, written by the perſon who is the principal ſubject of the hiſtory, written upon the buſineſs to which the hiſtory relates, and during the period, or ſoon after the period, which the hiſtory compriſes. No man can ſay that this altogether is not a body of ſtrong hiſtorical evidence.

When we reflect that ſome of thoſe, from whom the books proceeded, are related to have themſelves wrought miracles, to have been the ſubject of miracles, or of ſupernatural aſſiſtance in propagating the religion, we may perhaps be led to think, that more credit, or a different kind of credit, is due to theſe accounts, than what can be claimed by merely human teſtimony. But this is an argument which cannot be addreſſed to ſceptics or unbelievers. A man muſt be a Chriſtian before he can receive it. The inſpiration of the hiſtorical ſcriptures, and

* See Peter's ſpeech upon curing the cripple, (Acts iii. 18.) the council of the apoſtles, (xv.), Paul's diſcourſe at Athens, (xvii. 22.), before Agrippa, (xxvi.). I notice theſe paſſages, both as fraught with good ſenſe, and as free from the ſmalleſt tincture of enthuſiaſm.

and the nature, degree, and extent of that inſpiration, are queſtions undoubtedly of ſerious diſcuſſion, but they are queſtions amongſt Chriſtians themſelves, and not between them and others. The doctrine itſelf is by no means neceſſary to the belief of Chriſtianity, which muſt, in the firſt inſtance at leaſt, depend upon the ordinary maxims of hiſtorical credibility†.

In viewing the detail of miracles recorded in theſe books, we find every ſuppoſition negatived, by which they can be reſolved into fraud or deluſion. They were not ſecret, nor momentary, nor tentative, nor ambiguous; nor performed under the ſanction of authority, with the ſpectators on their ſide, or in affirmance of tenets and practices already eſtabliſhed. We find alſo the evidence alledged for them, and which evidence was by great numbers received, different from that upon which other miraculous accounts reſt. It was contemporary, it was publiſhed upon the ſpot, it continued; it involved intereſts and queſtions of the greateſt magnitude; it contradicted the moſt fixed perſuaſions and prejudices of the perſons to whom it was addreſſed; it required from thoſe who accepted it, not a ſimple indolent aſſent, but a change, from thenceforward, of principles and conduct, a ſubmiſſion to conſequences the moſt ſerious and the moſt deterring, to loſs and danger, to inſult, outrage, and perſecution

† See Powell's Diſcourſes. Diſcourſe xv. p. 245.

ſecution. How ſuch a ſtory ſhould be falſe, or, if falſe, how under ſuch circumſtances it ſhould make its way, I think impoſſible to be explained: yet ſuch the Chriſtian ſtory was, ſuch were the circumſtances under which it came forth, and in oppoſition to ſuch difficulties did it prevail.

An event ſo connected with the religion, and with the fortunes, of the Jewiſh people, as one of their race, one born amongſt them, eſtabliſhing his authority and his law throughout a great portion of the civilized world, it was perhaps to be expected, ſhould be noticed in the prophetic writings of that nation; eſpecially when this perſon, together with his own miſſion, cauſed alſo to be acknowledged, the divine original of their inſtitution, and by thoſe who before had altogether rejected it. Accordingly we perceive in theſe writings, various intimations *concurring* in the perſon and hiſtory of Jeſus, in a manner, and in a degree, in which paſſages taken from theſe books, could not be made to concur, in any perſon arbitrarily aſſumed, or in any perſon, except him, who has been the author of great changes in the affairs and opinions of mankind. Of ſome of theſe predictions the weight depends a good deal upon the concurrence. Others poſſeſs great ſeparate ſtrength: one in particular does this in an eminent degree. It is an entire deſcription, manifeſtly directed to one character and to one ſcene of things: it is extant in a writing,

ing, or collection of writings, declaredly prophetic; and to the circumſtances of his life and death, with conſiderable preciſion, and in a way which no diverſity of interpretation hath, in my opinion, been able to confound. That the advent of Chriſt, and the conſequences of it, ſhould not have been more diſtinctly revealed in the Jewiſh ſacred books, is, I think, in ſome meaſure accounted for by the conſideration, that for the Jews to have foreſeen the fall of their inſtitution, and that it was to merge at length into a more perfect and comprehenſive diſpenſation, would have cooled too much, and relaxed, their zeal for it, and their adherence to it, upon which zeal and adherence, the preſervation in the world of any remains, for many ages, of religious truth, might in a great meaſure depend.

Of what a revelation diſcloſes to mankind, one, and only one, queſtion can properly be aſked, "was it of importance to mankind to know, or to be better aſſured of?" In this queſtion, when we turn our thoughts to the great Chriſtian doctrine of the reſurrection of the dead, and of a future judgment, no doubt can be entertained. He who gives me riches or honours does nothing; he who even gives me health does little, in compariſon with that, which lays before me juſt grounds for expecting a reſtoration to life, and a day of account and retribution: which thing Chriſtianity hath done for millions.

Other

Other articles of the Chriſtian faith are only the adjuncts and circumſtances of this. They are however ſuch, as appear worthy of the original to which we aſcribe them. The morality of the religion, whether taken from the precepts or the example of its founder, or from the leſſons of its primitive teachers, derived, as it ſhould ſeem, from what had been inculcated by their maſter, is, in all its parts, wiſe and pure; neither adapted to vulgar prejudices, nor flattering popular notions, nor excuſing eſtabliſhed practices, but calculated, in the matter of its inſtruction, truly to promote human happineſs, and, in the form in which it was conveyed, to produce impreſſion and effect; a morality, which let it have proceeded from any perſon whatever, would have been ſatisfactory evidence of his good ſenſe and integrity, of the ſoundneſs of his underſtanding and the probity of his deſigns; a morality, in every view of it, much more perfect, than could have been expected from the natural circumſtances and character of the perſon who delivered it; a morality, in a word, which is, and hath been, moſt beneficial to mankind.

Upon the greateſt therefore of all poſſible occaſions, and for a purpoſe of ineſtimable value, it pleaſed the Deity to vouchſafe a miraculous atteſtation. Having done this for the inſtitution, when this alone could fix its authority, or give to it a beginning,

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he committed its future progreſs, to the natural means of human communication, and to the influence of thoſe cauſes by which human conduct and human affairs are governed. The ſeed being ſown, was left to vegetate; the leaven being inſerted, was left to ferment; and both according to the laws of nature: laws, nevertheleſs, diſpoſed and controuled by that Providence which conducts the affairs of the univerſe, though by an influence inſcrutable, and generally undiſtinguiſhable by us. And in this Chriſtianity is analogous to moſt other proviſions for happineſs. The proviſion is made; and being made, is left to act according to laws, which forming a part of a more general ſyſtem, regulate this particular ſubject, in common with many others.

Let the conſtant recurrence to our obſervation, of contrivance, deſign, and wiſdom in the works of nature, once fix upon our minds the belief of a God, and after that all is eaſy. In the councils of a Being, poſſeſſed of the power and diſpoſition, which the Creator of the univerſe muſt poſſeſs, it is not improbable that there ſhould be a future ſtate; it is not improbable that we ſhould be acquainted with it. A future ſtate rectifies every thing; becauſe if moral agents be made, in the laſt event, happy or miſerable, according to their conduct in the ſtation, and under the circumſtances in which they are placed, it ſeems not very material

material by the operation of what cauſes, according to what rules, or even, if you pleaſe to call it ſo, by what chance or caprice, theſe ſtations are aſſigned, or theſe circumſtances determined. This hypotheſis, therefore, ſolves all that objection to the divine care and goodneſs, which the promiſcuous diſtribution of good and evil (I do not mean in the doubtful advantages of riches and grandeur, but in the unqueſtionably important diſtinctions of health and ſickneſs, ſtrength and infirmity, bodily eaſe and pain, mental alacrity and depreſſion) is apt on ſo many occaſions to create. This one truth changes the nature of things: gives order to confuſion: makes the moral world of a piece with the natural.

Nevertheleſs, a higher degree of aſſurance, than that to which it is poſſible to advance this, or any argument drawn from the light of nature, was neceſſary, eſpecially to overcome the ſhock, which the imagination and the ſenſes receive, from the effects and the appearances of death; and the obſtruction which from thence ariſes to the expectation of either a continued or a future exiſtence. This difficulty, although of a nature, no doubt, to act very forcibly, will be found, I think, upon reflection, to reſide more in our habits of apprehenſion, than in the ſubject; and that the giving way to it, when we have any reaſonable grounds for the contrary, is rather an indulging of the imagination, than

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any thing elſe. Abſtractedly conſidered, that is, conſidered without relation to the difference which habit, and merely habit, produces in our faculties and modes of apprehenſion, I do not ſee any thing more in the reſurrection of a dead man, than in the conception of a child; except it be this, that the one comes into the world with a ſyſtem of prior conſciouſneſſes about him, which the other does not: and no perſon will ſay, that he knows enough of either ſubject to perceive, that this circumſtance makes ſuch a difference in the two caſes, that the one ſhould be eaſy, and the other impoſſible; the one natural, the other not ſo. To the firſt man the ſucceſſion of the ſpecies would be as incomprehenſible, as the reſurrection of the dead is to us.

Thought is different from motion, perception from impact: the individuality of a mind is hardly conſiſtent with the diviſibility of an extended ſubſtance; or its volition, that is, its power of orginating motion, with the inertneſs which cleaves to every portion of matter, which our obſervation or our experiments can reach. Theſe diſtinctions lead us to an immaterial principle: at leaſt, they do this; they ſo negative the mechanical properties of matter, in the conſtitution of a ſentient, ſtill more of a rational being, that no argument, drawn from theſe properties, can be of any great weight in oppoſition to other reaſons, when the queſtion reſpects the changes of which ſuch a nature is capable, or

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the manner in which theſe changes are effected. Whatever thought be, or whatever it depend upon, the regular experience of *ſleep* makes one thing concerning it certain, that it can be completely ſuſpended, and completely reſtored.

If any one find it too great a ſtrain upon his thoughts, to admit the notion of a ſubſtance ſtrictly immaterial, that is, from which extenſion and ſolidity are excluded, he can find no difficulty in allowing that a particle as ſmall as a particle of light, minuter than all conceivable dimenſions, may juſt as eaſily be the depoſitary, the organ, and the vehicle of conſciouſneſs, as the congeries of animal ſubſtance, which forms a human body, or the human brain; that, being ſo, it may transfer a proper identity to whatever ſhall hereafter be united to it; may be ſafe amidſt the deſtruction of its integuments; may connect the natural with the ſpiritual, the corruptible with the glorified body. If it be ſaid, that the mode and means of all this is imperceptible by our ſenſes, it is only what is true of the moſt important agencies and operations. The great powers of nature are all inviſible. Gravitation, electricity, magnetiſm, though conſtantly preſent, and conſtantly exerting their influence; though within us, near us, and about us; though diffuſed throughout all ſpace; overſpreading the ſurface, or penetrating the contexture of all bodies with which we are acquainted, depend upon ſubſtances

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and actions, which are totally concealed from our ſenſes. The Supreme Intelligence is ſo himſelf.

But whether theſe, or any other attempts to ſatisfy the imagination, bear any reſemblance to the truth, or whether the imagination, which, as I have ſaid before, is the mere ſlave of habit, *can* be ſatisfied, or not; when a future ſtate, and the revelation of a future ſtate, is not only perfectly conſiſtent with the attributes of the Being who governs the univerſe; but when it is more; when it alone removes the appearances of contrariety, which attend the operations of his will towards creatures capable of merit and demerit, of reward and puniſhment; when a ſtrong body of hiſtorical evidence, confirmed by many internal tokens of truth and authenticity, gives us juſt reaſon to believe that ſuch a revelation hath actually been made; we ought to ſet our minds at reſt with the aſſurance, that, in the reſources of creative wiſdom, expedients cannot be wanted, to carry into effect what the Deity hath purpoſed; that either a new and mighty influence will deſcend upon the human world, to reſuſcitate extinguiſhed conſciouſneſs; or that, amidſt the other wonderful contrivances with which the univerſe abounds, and by ſome of which we ſee animal life, in many inſtances, aſſuming improved forms of exiſtence, acquiring new organs, new perceptions, and new ſources of enjoyment, proviſion

ſion is alſo made, though by methods ſecret to us (as all the great proceſſes of nature are) for conducting the objects of God's moral government, through the neceſſary changes of their frame, to thoſe final diſtinctions of happineſs and miſery, which he hath declared to be reſerved for obedience and tranſgreſſion, for virtue and vice, for the uſe and the neglect, the right and the wrong employment, of the faculties and opportunities, with which he hath been pleaſed, ſeverally to entruſt and to try us.

THE END.